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WHAT IS ENGLISH?

A BOOK OF STRATEGY FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

(*Revised Edition*)

By

C. H. WARD

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Sentence and Theme, Theme-Building,
Junior Highway to English, etc.

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PREFACE

A book on the teaching of English usually, and quite properly, devotes much of its space to a description of the objectives of our profession—the purposes and hopes that ought to animate us, the achievements that may be ours. Another part of its space is often used for exhorting us to aim at those objectives. It treats in a broad way such broad subjects as our relations to society, coöperation, extra-curriculum duties. Its discussions are largely in terms of what can be done by a gifted teacher with eager students. If *What Is English?* is judged by these patterns, it will seem a queer thing. Its aims are entirely different: to describe in detail those devices that any teacher can use anywhere, to explain the reasons for methods, to address the novice teacher who has to deal with students who are not eager.

The parts of this book are not proportioned according to the relative importance of the topics, but according to the amount of concrete knowledge that can be given to teachers —for example, as much space is used for punctuation as for literature. The teaching of literature is largely a question of personality and is the part of English to which the novice has been bending his thoughts, whereas punctuation has hardly been in his mind and can be presented to him concretely. Oral composition is very largely a matter of personal skill, so that any concrete advice about it is perilous; but grammar, the purpose of which the novice knows nothing about, can be set forth very explicitly. *What Is English?* does not try to uplift, but to inform. This is the same effort that was made in the first edition, the small book published in 1917.

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During the eight years since 1917 I have been wondering what changes in the book would be necessary when a wider acquaintance with high-school conditions enabled me to revise it. The experience gained in that time has been far richer than I could have expected: I have made four textbooks and have become familiar with the varieties of criticism offered by teachers, have spoken before meetings of English teachers in sixteen states, and have given summer-session courses for teachers at the universities of Iowa and California. All this touring in the realms of opinion has, in one way, been dangerous; for it tempts a man to talk about his travels and to forget the daily work of his home. In every other way the widened acquaintance has been useful by showing what teachers desire in a manual of this sort. I have not found that much of the material in the first edition needs altering, but have learned what parts should be expanded and clarified. This new form is not a revision, but an enlargement.

Even now the book is incomplete. No volume ever will contain sufficient illustration of the multitude of details that a teacher wants to know. There is never time in a set of lectures to satisfy the demands for "fuller explanation," nor space in a chapter to "make this all clear." I dare not—for fear of seeming long-winded—include between these covers as much as teachers have requested in their letters, interviews, and criticisms of summer courses. Supplementary explanations and illustrations can be found in four manuals for teachers: (1) *Pilot Book for Sentence and Theme,* a pamphlet of two hundred seventy-two pages. Half of this is comment on the lessons of a textbook, but the other half is more general discussion, especially of mechanics for the ninth year (the eighth year in some Southern states). The *Pilot Book* is more complete than the two following manuals. (2) *Manual for The Junior Highway to English,* a pamphlet

of ninety-six pages designed to accompany a textbook for the seventh and eighth years (sixth and seventh in some Southern states). (3) *Workways for Theme-Building,* a pamphlet of one hundred fifty-five pages, a manual for a composition text used beyond the ninth year. Each of these three manuals is sold by the publishers for fifty cents, but a copy will be given to any teacher who uses one of the textbooks. (4) *English Evidence* (from the University of California Summer Session, 1924), a set of extracts from themes by fifty-six teachers on different phases of English; the teachers came from nineteen states, and the testimony selected for printing amounts to 65,000 words; the price to teachers is ninety cents.

Some of the material of *What Is English?* has appeared in special articles for educational publications, but the chapters are in no sense a set of reprinted articles. Thanks are due to the following journals for permission to adapt or use what they published: *English Journal:* Intensive Spelling, October, 1914; Punctator Gingriens, September, 1915; We Must Not Be Enemies, February, 1916; The Bottomless Pond of *oes,* March, 1916; The Scale Illusion, February, 1917; draft of the report of the Committee on the Mechanics of Writing (with Mrs. G. B. Scott and Earl Hudelson), February, 1919; The Next C. G. N. Report, November, 1919; The New Knowledge of Spelling, February, 1921. *Education:* English Apparatus, November, 1915; Accuracy First, October, 1917. *Educational Review:* What Is English? February, 1916. *The English Leaflet:* Inculcated Love, February, 1915; Defending Camelot, October, 1916; Critical Phantoms in *Macbeth,* June, 1918. *The School Review:* A Platform of Grammar, April, 1916. *Bulletin of the Illinois Association:* Exploring the Comma, November, 1916. *Scribner's Magazine:* Poking Fun at Grammar, February, 1922. *School and Home:* Phantom and Fact in English,

January, 1923. Short articles in *Visual Education, Educational Screen, Tri-State Notes, Bulletin of the New York Association.*

The emphasis in these articles has been on the necessity of thoroughness with rudiments, of laying the foundations before we try for decorated façades. To some teachers this has seemed dangerous doctrine; for rudiments are an abomination if taught for their own sake, and mere grubbing for foundations will never erect a building. Since I have small faith in my own judgment if it is opposed *to* any strong body of opinion, I should have regretted publishing *What Is English?* if it had received small support. But its principal thesis has been corroborated. So far as I know, nearly all successful teachers of long experience have arrived independently at the same conclusion, expressed thus by one woman, the head of a high-school department: "Seek ye first the rudiments, and all the rest shall be added unto you." Especially has the thesis been supported during the last decade by the wide spread of the faith in a program of "Minimum Essentials," a term of which I had not heard when I wrote the first edition of *What Is English?* The Minimum Essentials method, originated and propagated by teachers, is now the dominant idea in many state associations, is growing in force, and is nowhere opposed except by those who fear that it may be carried to extremes. It is the basis of all the advice given in this book.

It is the basis of mother-tongue instruction in French schools, as readably described in R. W. Brown's *How the French Boy Learns to Write.* Professor Brown says that "of course in the early grades the matters to receive chief attention are ordinary accuracy and conventional correctness." He quotes the national *programmes* of study, which require (to cite one illustration) that pupils shall have "their attention called to punctuation" in the grades that correspond to

our third and fourth, and that they shall be taught "the principles of punctuation" in the next two grades. Throughout the rest of the course pupils are held so strictly to account for these minima that "in cases where the inevitable poor pupil risks violating custom by handing in 'sloppy' work the teacher is likely to regard his action as a personal insult." There is an epitome of the mode of work that is favored in the world's most literary nation, the nation which is generally conceded to be more ambitious and skilful than any other in its mother-tongue instruction. Any reader who feels that such ideals are improper will be out of sympathy with *What Is English?* and should not read farther in it. If any teacher wishes to establish a fashion of conventional correctness, he will never succeed without a faith in Minimum Essentials. (See Chapter X, page 280.)

Mere faith will accomplish nothing; the teacher who would succeed nowadays must understand a definite technique that is intricate and in many respects incredible to those who lack experience. This technique is new in most schools. English used to be considered above and beyond other subjects of the curriculum. Its function was supposed to be the cultivation of insight into beauty, of charm and finesse in expression. Teachers used to take pride in the idea that their beautiful occupation had little to do with imparting facts to crassly ignorant minds, felt little need of accurate knowledge or careful scheme of attack. Algebra, Latin, physics—these required a teacher to have definite information and to go about his instruction according to plans worked out through centuries of experience. But English was supposed to demand only hazy desire and the throb of inspiration. A large proportion of its teachers used to profess horror at the notion that the main purpose of secondary English is to attack methodically the most rudimentary illiteracy. They felt that such a proposal

could come only from a mental blacksmith, and thus made the mechanics of their art an almost unmentionable subject.

But the rudiments are indelicate no longer. Teachers and principals and supervisors are everywhere inquiring and experimenting with methods of securing decency in high-school composition and ability to read plain prose with understanding. Even if their own common sense did not impel them, they would be driven by the public opinion of the day: employers of high-school graduates are complaining about "lame ducks" who "don't know anything"; state universities are spending taxes to teach their freshmen sixth-grade rudiments of composition; high-school seniors and college freshmen are sadly inquiring, "Why didn't they teach us something definite?"

If a novice is resolved to meet this social demand, where can he look for counsel? He knows not what his objective is, nor what to do, nor how to do it, nor how to correlate the demands for literature and written composition and oral composition and spelling and grammar and "appreciation" and clear thinking and self-expression and sentence-structure and analysis of style—and so on, world without end. Inexperienced teachers perform one-third of the English work in the high schools of the country. They cannot rely on their texts for guidance as teachers of algebra can; and so rapidly have methods changed that they may get only misdirection by recalling how they themselves were taught when they were in school. So there is a need of a vade mecum which shall display what one man has observed, what he has found essential, how he drives at that objective, and what devices he has learned to employ. Such a guide may be wide of the truth in some particulars; not all of it can be used by any one reader. But it is a coherent body of practice which is available until a teacher has had time to build plans of his own. Everything here presented is the

result of experience—an experience based on acquaintance with the product of many schools in all parts of the country. Every one of the suggestions has been tested for at least five years and most of them for twelve; some for twenty-four. Nothing has been arrived at by experimenting with a preconception; everything has been forced upon the author by observing what was effective with particular young human beings who sat on material benches in an actual classroom.

Those boys that I have taught for a quarter of a century came from the high schools of nearly every state; they were average American boys whose needs were not peculiar; they were not "crammed" by any special process for any abnormal purpose; they were trained toward the same objectives that all secondary schools try to reach. My problems, as I have often found during the last eight years, are the same problems that every high school encounters.

No reader should accept my solutions because they are printed in a book, nor reject them by any process of abstract reasoning. He should read skeptically and decide by his own observation what are the facts of this craft of teaching English.

CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE 3

CHAPTERS

I. WHAT ENGLISH IS 15

II. DESCENT TO EARTH 31

III. THE WONDERS OF SPELLING 37

IV. THE TEACHING OF SPELLING 60

V. WHY STUDY GRAMMAR? 120

VI. GRAMMAR FOR COMPOSITION

A. For Improving Style 132

B. Grammar for Knowledge of What a Sentence Is . 151

C. Grammar for Punctuation 155

VII. THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

A. General Policies 157

B. General Strategy 166

C. The Order of Topics 175

D. Tactics in Each Topic 182

VIII. WHAT AND WHY IS PUNCTUATION?

Proem to Chapters VIII and IX 211

A. The Land of "Nobody Knows" 212

B. But Anybody Can See What Punctuation Is . . 216

C. What Is Authority? 222

D. The Usefulness of Punctuation in School . . . 226

E. Punctuation As Separation 231

F. Punctuation for Sentence Sense 233

G. Beware of Rules 239

CHAPTERS PAGE

IX. Present Usage in Punctuation 244

X. Minimum Essentials

A. A Caution against Essentials 280
B. What the Excitement Is All about 287
C. What Some Excited People Do 293
D. What Minima Are 299
E. How Minima Grew Up 304
F. The "Mastery" Idea 310
G. Samples of Published Minima 311
H. The Program of Minima Is a Necessity 314

XI. What Is Theme Value? 318

A. The Grand Literary Tradition 320
B. The Relation of Literature to Composition . . . 323
C. A Theme Is Not a Piece of Literature 324
D. Penalizing the Lack of Literary Skill 326
E. The Scale Illusion 332
F. One Way of Grading 343

XII. Oral Composition

A. Four Reasons for Faith in Oral Composition . . 349
B. Four Reasons for Doubt 352
C. Practical Difficulties As I Have Found Them . . 356
D. The Difficulties That Other People Have Found . 361
E. The Undoubted Benefits of Oral Work 365

XIII. Vocabulary Work

A. Increasing the Store of Words 371
B. "Good English" 379
C. Slang 391
D. Pronunciation 393

CHAPTERS PAGE

XIV. Theme Work

A. Assigning Topics 397
B. The Structure of Themes 402
C. The Four "Types" of Composition 408
D. The Artistic Motivation 410
E. Handling Themes 412

XV. Reading 422

XVI. The Teaching of Literature

A. Seeing the Picture 444
B. What Books for the Course of Study? 454
C. Outside Reading 457
D. What Is a Classic? 460
E. The Persons in Literature 461
F. The History of Literature 462
G. Figures of Speech 463
H. Separating Literature and Composition 465
I. Testing Literature Lessons 467
J. Defending Camelot 468
K. This Changing Age 469

Index 473

CHAPTER I

WHAT ENGLISH IS

An inexperienced teacher does not need to be told what mathematics is. If he were suddenly asked to take an arithmetic class, he would not have to seek advice about what he was to do; his textbook would be in itself a sufficient guide. The long sets of problems, the careful grading of these sets from very easy to somewhat hard, the elaborate display of every step in working a new kind of problem, the wary and slow advance from one small difficulty to another —in all these ways the book declares on every page that things which are simple to the teacher are perplexing to the child, that the teacher must take time and be thorough, that arithmetic is a long campaign in which the conquest of simple fractions is a huge operation.

But suppose the subject were new and that professors of astronomy, with little sympathy for children's minds, were furnishing the textbooks. Their brains have been engrossed with stellar parallax and the fourth dimension. The result would be a preface explaining that "Arithmetic is an introduction to that noblest and most useful of sciences, to the science of quantity and arrangement, to the study of ideal constructions, and the discovery thereby of relations between the parts of these constructions." The untrained teacher, trusting that the great savant knew his business, would dutifully require William and Susan to commit this precious truth to memory. Then he would begin with a lesson in subtracting decimals, quickly go through a page in long division, spend two recitations on fractions, devote

three days to percentage, and so quickly proceed to quadratic equations and the plotting of curves.

That is an exaggeration, yet it comes much nearer to plain facts than any of us realize. It represents all too vividly the prevalent faith of the 90's, when English was being adopted as an entrance subject in many places. It came to be conceived as "power to appreciate literature." Examinations required the candidate to show some ability to criticize and appraise literary values. The attention of high schools was fixed on the reading of classics, on developing "insight," and on writing about books "appreciatively." This kind of thing lasted through the 90's and into the present century. How resultless it all was may be judged from a paper written in 1905 by a Harvard examiner, in which he calls the fetish "that indefinable and vague quality." He would not have dared to utter those words ten years previously. Now he is not afraid to say: "So few possess 'literary appreciation' that after a careful search through the higher graded books of the spring and fall examinations of the last two years I have found no specimen to quote which possesses more than a semblance." This college instructor longed just as much as ever for the teacher who could "inspire the writer with something of the spirit that awakens the consciousness of literary appreciation"; but had to protest that as a matter of fact no such power had been evidenced in the Harvard papers.

He proposed a substitute: "To create and give utterance to his own ideas; freer, more natural, and more individual expression; his individuality counts for everything." That became the formula in the twentieth century. All texts and councils and addresses to conventions had much to say about "expressing ourselves in a pleasing way." They seldom failed to imply the scorn which the Harvard man expressed so fiercely against "teaching this living, breathing

English composition as mechanically as they do the unchangeable and rigid laws of science." Hence few teachers dared to profess publicly that they paid any attention to mechanics. The word was anathema.

Most of the textbooks were written in a literary atmosphere as different from schoolroom necessities as astronomy is from simple decimals. One author wrote, addressing children: "An artist does not paint a masterpiece without continual effort, changing, modifying, perfecting his work by degrees. Only constant rewriting will help you to gain the power of self-expression." That may be as true as the definition of mathematics, but it is the astronomy of rhetoric. Another author said: "After matters of technique have become so easy for us that we need to give them little attention, we may seek for something original to say"; and again, "When these elements of literary construction are once understood, the problem of composition is merely that of their effective combination." This was sheer astronomy.

Such glittering star-dust was all the while covering a most hideous reality, which it was not good form to discuss. The ugly fact of illiteracy was not to be mentioned in our soulful circles. The Harvard man politely referred to it in his paper as "what the examiner ought not to find." Since it must not be named, he employed that delicate euphemism. He adroitly said, "The familiarity of the teacher with what I am talking about warns me to omit discussion." Even when he was "tempted to present a few examples" of this unmentionable thing, he chose blunders in diction and cases of wobbly structure. It is curious to see how very, very refined the world was in that bygone age before the World War.

Yet the Harvard man understated the great body of university opinion. Colleges loathed and dreaded the slipshod

school work, but failed to advise teachers to do with thoroughness the humble part of their duty. They failed because there was no agreement on the method of securing results. What they longed for was carefulness; what they were principally occupied with, what they talked about, was "appreciation." They left us confused, at variance, unguided. High schools, planning their courses for students who were not to receive further education, assumed a college attitude, fixed their attention on "appreciation" and "living, breathing composition."

I should be the last to make fun of "living and breathing." If a teacher does not keep that ideal before him, he is a pedagogical corpse. But if he is so engrossed with "living" themes that he cannot see the illiteracy he cultivates, he is making educational corpses of the poor students. Schools and universities now recognize that mere, plain, humble education in decent composition must not be murdered, but must be fostered—*first.*

Listen to four illustrations of the hard facts of practice: (1) It is all but impossible in four years to train a whole class of bright boys to use *lie, lay, lain,* or to avoid *trys* and *crys.* (2) A professor in one of our oldest universities testifies that all he can exact as an English requirement for the degree of Ph.B. is reasonably decent spelling and punctuation, that to insist on skill in paragraphing would mean the withholding of so many degrees that other departments would protest. (3) In 1919 one of the largest and best known of the state universities gave a very simple test in sentence structure to all the fully accredited freshmen after they had been matriculated one month, and discovered that only one-third of them could tell the difference between a phrase and a sentence. (4) A considerable fraction of the university graduates who teach high-school English (probably about one-sixth of them) are not masters of the

minimum requirements that are commonly announced in courses of study for promotion from junior high schools.

The interest in such facts (a whole bookful of a similar sort could be gathered) is recent; if they had been discovered thirty years ago, they would have been considered unfit to print. Twenty years ago they would have been considered unpleasant and unimportant—a product of muck-raking. Fifteen years ago they would have been thought somewhat significant, but most teachers would have felt that it was bad form to betray much interest in them; an interest of any kind in rudiments was likely to mark a person as mechanical, inartistic, soulless. The English-teaching world still directed its telescope toward the stars, still had a lofty, literary ideal. Ten years ago the harsh facts were being announced as matters of vital concern.

Nowadays the cry goes up from every college in the land, "Our freshmen can't spell, can't punctuate." Every high school is worried because so many students are ignorant of rudiments. A reformation is everywhere demanded. It is being brought about, and so rapidly that most textbooks are stranded in the idealism of a decade ago, and many teachers are floundering badly in the new conditions. It is hard to keep pace with the swift change, hard to know what it is all about or why our duties are preached to us in such contradictory terms. "Inspire" is still the watch-cry; "drill in rudiments" is the fact of practice.

A bit of personal experience will show how times are changing. The first chapter of a draft of this book written in 1913 had a legend in capitals: "This is not guaranteed wisdom; it is merely what I find it necessary to do." So much was it the fashion to denounce drill in rudiments that the book would have roused antagonism if it had spoken unqualifiedly. That fashion has so much changed

now that I should feel no hesitation in saying, "This *is* guaranteed wisdom"; because every number of the *English Journal,* every talk with a college instructor, makes it plainer that English-teaching has been inefficient—sadly inefficient—and that we have had the wrong notion of our duty. Even in 1912, in the first number of the *English Journal,* a high-school teacher had declared: "Everywhere the answer is the same. The colleges cannot sufficiently condemn our product. . . . Business men tell us that our graduates cannot write a decent letter." And in July, 1924, a normal-school man, Dr. Blaisdell, of Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania, made these carefully weighed utterances in his presidential address to the National Council of Teachers of English, which he entitled "Facing the Facts":

> Few of the men and women graduated within a month from our colleges can write a creditable business letter. Only an exceptional one can interest an audience for ten minutes as he talks about a familiar subject. Not many have the habit of reading anything except the sporting page. They came to college without these skills; they leave without them. College instruction in English lacks the practical, is abstract, is sometimes only vacuous vaporing. . . . High schools, guided by college requirements, give three-quarters of their English time to cramming students with inconsequential facts, so that they can prove they have read certain "classics." . . . Junior high schools and intermediate schools scatter too much. They should focus on fundamentals. They should habituate pupils to oral and written accuracy. . . . Until a national survey has determined aims for each type of school, high schools, forgetting college entrance, should teach the fundamentals that have not been taught earlier, and colleges should take students as they find them and teach them the English that they will need in life.

One possible misunderstanding of what these teachers mean, and of what I mean in this chapter, must here be

anticipated. If it can be removed, this will be the most important paragraph in the book. I am not arguing that *tries* is of greater importance than a lively introduction to a theme. I am not arguing that a semicolon is better than emulating the charm of Stevenson. I have not the least feeling that mechanical accuracy is more blessed than graceful style. I do not think any less of George Meredith because he once wrote *alright.* I am not in any way or degree, anywhere in this book, instituting any comparison between two such utterly unlike things as knowledge of mechanics and literary skill. That would be as monstrous as to compare ditch-digging with painting a madonna. Knowledge of how to form plurals or to use commas is one of the unloveliest things in an ugly world. It gives me no joy whatever. But my lack of joy has nothing to do with the case. The sad fact of nation-wide experience for a generation is that our effort to teach charming English has not amounted to much, and that our failure to teach decent English is so scandalous that men point the finger of scorn at us. Our first and simplest and plainest duty is to teach decent English. Not the most seraphic of the astronomers of rhetoric ever opposed that idea. But we have thought this elementary part of the task so easy that it could be performed incidentally, as a sort of side-issue. Actually it is very hard, requiring careful approach, skilful handling, and arduous labor. That first task must be done first. This book denies none of the glorious possibilities that may lie beyond.

Do not suppose that this book is the argument of a man who is overwrought by long conflict with elementary ignorance. Consider the following bits from the "Introductory Remarks" to the Report of the Inland Empire Council, April, 1919, written by O. B. Sperlin, a Tacoma high-school teacher; notice that he is speaking about accuracy "first"—

which does not mean ultimate in importance any more than "safety first" means that caution is a better virtue than valor.

Professor Denny has given us the axiom, the heartening axiom, that we can teach the very alphabet to the glory of God. If this is true, why can we not teach spelling, grammar, and punctuation, not only for the glory of God, but to the glory of Flora and Roy as well? . . . The cry is now, let us thank our stars, for accuracy first. Why not? You and I, unfortunately, were brought up under a régime which decreed that spelling, grammar, and punctuation should come by nature, should come incidentally; figures of speech, versification, rhetorical principles should come first. But did the incidentals come at all? For the ninety-nine who are out in the world today they came not at all. . . . Why not accuracy first? We have tried spontaneity, facility; and still we are disgraced by the illiteracy we have produced. We have tried literary appreciation first; we have produced neither literary appreciation nor literacy. We cannot require spontaneity; that would be an absurdity. We cannot require literary appreciation in original composition, for the large majority would be doomed to failure. We can require accuracy; it has been to our shame that we have not required it. Then why not accuracy first, in the hope that other desirable ends may be added to Flora and Roy as well as to Mary and John? . . . The Economy Committee declares that "time spent on rhetorical niceties before mechanics are habitual is lost." Amen say we.

"Accuracy first" is not the whole truth. It can easily be ridiculed by those who misinterpret the meaning; it may mislead teachers who have no interests above the level of mechanics; it seems a wrong-headed doctrine to some college professors of English; it appears a horrid perversion to many persons who were born with a gift of style. So be warned of the peril of adopting such a maxim. Even if you decide that it is a common-sense idea, beware of announcing your allegiance to it—for the following reason:

most literary-minded people, if they have never been school-teachers, will rate you as a comma-fiend when they learn that you belong to the accuracy party. They simply cannot conceive that a person of refinement would subscribe to such a repellent faith.

And their horror is so natural that we must excuse it and sympathize with it. Consider their way of thinking: "I never received any help from grammar; I punctuate pretty well by instinct; I always felt hampered by the purisms of a teacher. *I know from my own experience* that I acquired the mechanics incidentally." That reasoning may be true when applied to this witty professor, to that urbane critic, to the clever editor, to a broad-minded superintendent of schools. All such people constitute a delightful company, with which a teacher of English likes to be identified. Don't align yourself against them and thus exile yourself from communion with the elect. Profess all the literary taste you have, smile at "accuracy first"—and keep your mind open to the possibility that Messrs. Blaisdell, Sperlin, and all their tribe are right. You need not be a partisan on either side of the fray; but you must, if you hope to succeed, test the arguments in your own work.

You will find that those who believe in learning mechanics "incidentally" often direct their scorn at false and silly rules for diction, idioms, and syntax. Their scorn is fully justified, for nearly all the efforts at such kinds of accuracy are based on sheer superstition and strive for a purism that is silly. Messrs. Blaisdell and Sperlin have no sympathy with purism in these matters of taste and do not wish formal rules applied to diction or grammar. Their fight is for an entirely different sort of correctness—for rooting out gross blunders in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.

Their experience has convinced them that the necessary knowledge for making clean composition can never be im-

parted "incidentally" to most students. The "incidental" method would work perfectly in a class composed of young Stevensons and Cabells, or of such superior lads as Fred Newton Scott, Charles William Eliot, and Nicholas Murray Butler used to be. It will not work at all, so far as most practical teachers can see nowadays, with the other ninety-eight per cent of students, who make the English problem. Before you join the incidentalists—who really are such delightful people that it is a temptation to join them—read the chapter on Minimum Essentials and teach five years.

So far as I know, the first authoritative pronouncement against the incidentalists was made by the University of Wisconsin in 1913, when it sent out a pamphlet of guidance for English teachers of the state. This contained an avowal that "composition consists of two parts, a higher and a lower," that the higher cannot be an academic requirement, that the lower must be cultivated as a first and fundamental necessity for education in any line. In 1915 (*English Journal* for November) four instructors of the University of Illinois explained to an astonished world that they conditioned a theme in the first semester of freshman year for three misspelled words or one incomplete sentence. They may be all wrong. This book does not judge whether they are right or wrong. It deals only with the present-day facts. And there is not the slightest doubt that these gentlemen fairly represent a sentiment about carefulness in details which has constantly increased in the decade since they testified. They said flatly that "originality without literacy cannot in any place or under any circumstances be considered a meritorious quality in a college course in English composition." What do you suppose they would think about school themes? Are you inclined to deny their thought? If so, suspend judgment till you have read the chapter on Minimum Essentials and learned the trend of opinion today.

Do not suppose that the trend is downward. Education in this country is not descending. Do not suppose that any conflict of purpose exists or any disagreement as to what real merit is. All sensible teachers must agree on what constitutes a good theme, do agree always that ability to apprehend literary values and to express oneself pleasingly are the only qualities that make writing valuable. These steps do not mark any change in a judgment that has never altered since Cadmus invented letters. They simply show a progressive realization of what cannot be obtained in school composition. All professors still prize and give credit for "appreciation"; but they seldom see it, and they cannot require it. All teachers still value spontaneity, and we secure quite a bit of it; but we have learned that it is not a curricular subject, that we cannot require it. What we can require, what it is dishonest not to require, is accuracy. It is wrong to leave pupils so ignorant of mechanics that their letters prove them to be uneducated.

Fifty years from now the student of educational history will be puzzled to know what the schools thought they were doing in the first quarter of the twentieth century. His comment will run about like this: "Those teachers were not stylists—at least very few were. Why did the great majority suppose they could impart what they did not possess? They must have seen that only a small minority of pupils could achieve a graceful style; what did they suppose they were doing for the majority? Did they even flatter themselves that the minority's charm of style was due to instruction? And suppose this power to write pleasingly had been much more general, what was the prodigious exercise of it all about? Did teachers conceive that they were training up professional authors, or were they counting on private theme-writing as an enjoyment comparable to amateur painting or piano-playing? It is hard to see the similarity.

Were they aiming at literary letters? Nothing is so affected and unpleasant. Why, then, all their parade of 'perfecting the work by degrees'? What did they think they were doing?"

I, for one, am glad that I shall not have to answer those inquiries. English ought to be the greatest good to the greatest number. Perhaps we can see more clearly how we ought to work if we pay more attention to the future historian.

You may be surprised that so much is said here about composition, for you know that themes are only one part of English. You would be excusable for thinking them a very small fraction. Glance through this list of the different things that English is. It represents graphically the impression we might get from reading a few dozen pedagogical articles, though it is shorter and less confusing than the reality would be. Capitals indicate the topics that would stand out more prominently because of their frequency or the deep feeling with which they are discussed:

A LOVE OF LITERATURE, the college entrance books, supplementary reading, narratives and expositions, TEACH CLEAR THINKING, grammar, coöperation with other departments, magazine reading, imitate Burke or Homer or Goldsmith, spelling, teach paragraphs by an analogy with geometry, stimulate refined speech, coach dramatics, prosody, analyze masterpieces, memorizing of poems, INSPIRE A LOVE FOR CLASSICS, DON'T TRY TO IMPOSE THE CLASSICS, history of English and American literature, read to the pupils, teach effectiveness in writing, insist on precision in writing, don't look for precision, encourage charm and freedom, STIMULATE INSIGHT, declamations, ORAL COMPOSITION, teach playwriting, CHOOSE A WIDE VARIETY OF READING, develop personality, CULTIVATE SOUND TASTE IN LITERATURE, have private conferences, much reading aloud by the pupils, argumentation, word analysis, have pupils correct the themes, THE LOVE OF GOOD READ-

ING, correct pronunciation, DON'T USE ANNOTATIONS, teach criticism of the art of different authors, insist on theme outlines, coach debaters, REFUSE TO BE HAMPERED BY NARROW COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS, business English, dictionary work, ENCOURAGE GOOD READING, ORAL COMPOSITION.

Perhaps some of these extra-curriculum tasks, like supervising dramatics or debating or journalism, may fall to your share. Nothing will be said in this book,* however, about such matters, because local conditions vary extremely and because your own good sense can get little help from another teacher's advice. They are largely questions of your own talents and initiative. The whole mass of jumbled English reduces to three subjects, of which the first is how to read —called Literature. This is now the part of English that receives the largest share of attention, the part that may always take up the largest portion of time. It may in the future, when elements of composition are properly taught in the grades, occupy an even greater proportion of the schedule. But to this subject, in spite of its importance, I shall devote only two chapters. Handling literature is largely a matter of personality; advice about methods is likely to be futile; and the world is already full of counsel about what to aim at. The second subject is how to speak—called Oral Composition. This is a new phase of English which has raised extravagant hopes. It has been thought by some to be more useful than written composition "because we talk more than we write"; but it requires a much higher degree of skill in a teacher than written composition and is still an undeveloped art. Moreover, its technique is relatively simple and inspirational, not containing any such intricate system of definitely teachable skills as written composition. Oral composition—even if it is as important as it seems to

*See *English Evidence* (told about on page 5) for some essays describing conditions in these subjects.

its heartiest advocates—must occupy relatively small space in a book that deals only with explanations of details. If a teacher has a genius for oral work, no book can help him; if he has not a genius, no book can tell him more about the secrets of success than one chapter will contain.

I know full well from past experience how strange it will seem to many readers that such a small proportion of space is used for literature and oral composition, which bulk so large in curriculums; I know how naturally some critics will exclaim, "This fellow pays scant attention to two-thirds of the English field!" So I had best repeat here the words of the Preface: "The book is not proportioned according to the relative importance of the topics." It is proportioned according to the ignorance of the ordinary novice and according to the amount of concrete information that can be given. If a writer of a book for teachers wants to exhort, to stimulate enthusiasm, to talk about the glories of achievement, his proportions will be the inverse of mine; he will dwell mostly on the inspiration of literature and the value of arousing oral discussion. This book has a different aim, an aim that teachers often describe thus: "Don't give us generalities and spiritual uplift; give us the practical details, the homely little tricks of the trade which we can't find in print." No critic should object to proportions which seem ill-advised until he has encountered a few hundred teachers who have explained to him what they need and what they do not need.

3 The third subject is written composition, which is more capable of detailed explanations and is of more basic importance than is generally realized. It is the part of English which is most necessary for advanced education, and hence is considered an indispensable part of the equipment of a college freshman. For example, the University of California has only one entrance test, which it considers an absolute

necessity for a standard of scholarship and which it requires of all students entering any department: the writing of a simple exposition without many mistakes in mechanics. The University of Wisconsin has urged this necessity upon the schools of the state for the same reason that it has encouraged a knowledge of growing corn and judging cattle—because it wants boys and girls prepared for real life. The stressing of written composition in Wisconsin is not an antique theory, but a modern, progressive policy. What Wisconsin demands the world demands. Business men may not be indifferent to a knowledge of *Sir Launfal*, but they cannot accept it as a substitute for proper spelling and punctuation. Parents will never excuse teachers for allowing children to remain ignorant of the rudiments of written composition. They are glad to have Thomas know some lyrics by heart, are pleased if he acquires at school a fondness for talking fluently; but their gratification turns to grief if Thomas's letter to his grandfather is barbarously spelled and punctuated. With one common judgment the world insists on at least a modicum of ability to make clean sentences.

"Skill in making decent sentences" will not serve as a definition of English, but it is that part of English which any novice most needs to have expounded. The ability to make pleasing sentences was formerly supposed to depend on the ability to read well; the two sorts of skill were blended in a conglomerate called "English," and the compound had the color of literature. Now the two subjects are being separated. Appreciation of literature may be more essential for cultivating the graces and joys of life, may be a more vital subject—as beauty is more vital than machinery in the best kind of living. But literature is not a necessity in professional training or in preparing a high-school student to earn a living. Written composition is such a necessity,

more urgent than any other part of the curriculum. And the efficient teacher secures the major portion of his results by directing efforts at written sentences. Therefore—strange and unwise as it may seem to some academic critics—the strategy of securing clean, decent, pleasing sentences will occupy two-thirds of this book.

This chapter has spread the data before you and shown the point of view of the writer. You can see what he thinks English is and how his conception differs from yours. So there is no need of summarizing and setting down a formal definition of English. But since the title of the chapter seems to promise an answer to a question, it may be well to state what our multiform and changeful subject seems to be today. It seems to be triune. (1) English is the effort that society makes to instruct youth in communicating ideas. This broad conception is a theme for the publicist and the pedagogical expert to develop. Every good teacher should work in and with the great conception, but no mere teacher is fitted to expound it. (2) As English is taught in schools, it is largely a matter of personality, of innate skill in adjusting the personalities of young people. So important is this element of English, so overwhelmingly important, that mere methods of work are not significant in comparison with it. Hence it is the element that receives most space and stress in books addressed to teachers. The library of pedagogy is flooded with these efforts to stimulate personality, and therefore this book need not add its drop to the torrent. (3) This book aims only at the third and the least of the elements of English—the practical ways of working that are independent of personality and that are specially needed by that large minority of teachers who are novices. We train students to limit their theme topics. This book is limited to a small part of the subject of English: concrete information.

CHAPTER II

DESCENT TO EARTH

A man who presumes to offer advice is more likely to succeed if he addresses someone in particular. To have in mind teachers in general while I write is to court failure. I have chosen to imagine that "you" who read are a college graduate who has been electing a good deal of English during the last two years. I think of you as a young woman, though I am generally obliged to speak of you as "he." You have your diploma and are engaged to teach English in the Smithboro high school. During the summer you are rather vaguely wondering whether you had better be doing anything in particular to prepare yourself for the new work. You have been assigned to freshman English, and have therefore been reading over the classics you are to teach and have carefully gone through the textbook you are to use. Is there more to do? You have an uneasy feeling that you don't know what is expected of you beyond exhibiting some critical shrewdness and exerting a literary uplift—being a center of sweetness and light. Quite by chance a friend has put this volume into your hand.

Of course "you" are all sorts of people. Occasionally teachers of five years' experience look over another person's ideas, for they never can tell where they may pick up useful hints. But I shall always speak as if to one who has never taught, for I have known so many cases of English-teachers-to-be who would have been grateful for some simple guide-book. Not that they would follow it trustfully (skepticism is the only safe attitude toward any advice of the kind set down here), but that they could get some

definite program, however opinionated and distorted, from which they could depart. It is more useful to stir you to a procedure of your own than to persuade you to an easy acquiescence. These chapters are not to be swallowed, but to be pondered.

In another way my readers are very heterogeneous: some will have all the English and parts of other subjects in a small school; others will have one division of one class in a large city school. One may have complete liberty to follow his own judgment; another may have everything prescribed. But "you" are going to Smithboro, where you will have a good deal of chance to exercise your own judgment; and "you" are the sort of person who wishes to know the essentials of his trade in all conditions.

The purpose is to furnish the general strategy of that long, long process of teaching how to compose a good series of varied sentences into a coherent series of paragraphs. The tricks of the trade may be so presented that a teacher can profit by other people's failures, learning in a few hours what he might struggle toward blindly for years—as I did. This manual will not inform you how to convey spiritual values. It is only a set of mechanical aids for teaching mechanics. Any author who promises more is not likely to perform.

I will first explain something that is true of every college graduate when he begins to teach English. He has a feeling that his knowledge of the subject is broad, catholic. He has come down from the stars upon the narrow texts and the ignorant class. Not that he is conceited. Far from it. He may be all humbleness, may feel too sensitively his shortcomings. But after his senior electives or graduate specializings he feels that the little earth of school is all surrounded and comprehended by his wideness. I have never yet encountered a sensible high-school teacher who did

not look back with a smile and a little chagrin at his state of mind when he began to teach. "I was thinking of my college notebooks from literature courses," he says, "and of how I was going to arouse enthusiasm for the best in literature"; then he describes bumping against some school fact such as "they couldn't tell a verb from a pronoun" or "not one of them had ever studied any English history." That was exactly my own experience during the first week. I had planned to use notes on Restoration drama; what I encountered was a senior who wrote that "they ought to of known better."

Try to anticipate this dizzy fall from high splendors to lowly facts. Try to realize that all your university study is of no direct use at first, however precious it may be later and indirectly. Try to put aside the feeling that this new, low region of ignorance is an unworthy place where you may soil your pure ambrosial weeds of academe. Put off your sky-robes, spun out of literary woof. Look, as a spirit from Jove's court should, at the poor students chained by the villain of the educational drama, Carelessness. Study the power of his deadly wand and learn how to use haemony. If you do not soon find your emotions stirred by this task of rescue, you will never be a teacher of English. The school world merely appears small and low-thoughted at first to one who has been studying astronomically, of how Shakespeare's genius was not for originating plots, of Chaucer's indebtedness to Boccaccio. It is actually as wide, as full of wonders, demands as keen exploration, as the skyey regions that you have been mapping.

One reason why it seems restricted is that you encounter such marvelous ignorance of what seems to you common knowledge. In the secondary world the verb *was* takes an object; *discribe* is the form preferred by pupils who have read Cicero; Plato is the ruler of the underworld; the art of

Silas Marner is "where Eppie was put in the coal-hole." It is almost impossible to feel that those who make such blunders have intellects as good as your own. They have. That is the great truth for an English teacher to keep in mind. A teacher of algebra is differently situated; he does know everything and the pupil knows nothing. But the English teacher is a fellow-being. He never can know a tithe of what may be useful and is always in peril of showing his ignorance. Only yesterday I learned *mumpsimus*, a word I have always needed; and after twenty-five years of zealous consultation of the dictionaries I pronounced *rationale* like a French word. When I set myself at age forty to learn French irregular verbs, I found myself hardly getting a passing mark; a boy who was excessively dull in an English class thought I was a numskull when he tried to teach me how to use a telephone switchboard.

Another reason why the region of school seems so hopelessly restricted is the persistence of error that has been again and again dilated upon. Yet even this is not so discreditable to the young minds as you would suppose. The explanation is usually that in lower grades they have been allowed to confirm themselves in wrong habits; the wrong forms are fairly engraved in their brains. When you tackle *seperate*, you are like young Thor who supposed he was merely struggling to lift a cat, whereas the animal was the serpent who held the earth together. *Seperate* is a tremendous antagonist, who looks feeble enough, but is in reality the greatest force in life, habit. You have warfare before you; titanic forces are to be grappled with. To know in advance what you must contend against is an advantage beyond exaggeration. Nearly the whole difference between an experienced and an inexperienced teacher is that the former has acquired a handy code of these troubles, so as to be able to anticipate them; and also a set of methods for

stamping truths upon youthful brains. The aim of this book is to supply some devices of this sort.

Knowing what to do means knowing what not to attempt. The most probable mistake of a novice will be struggling with choice of words. Chapter XIII, page 371, explains why this question of "bad English" is not what you have always supposed. Unless you know how to avoid the perils described there, do not expect to achieve much in "enriching vocabulary." Do not assume that the tactful magic of your personality will stimulate a class to criticize oral themes with spirit; don't attempt magic, but feel your way cautiously, adapting your methods to the facts of your class as you find them. Don't take it for granted that every written theme must be outlined in advance, must be written in two or three drafts, and must be based on "mental content" obtained from reading. Don't suppose that paragraphs must begin with a topic sentence and be constructed by one of the eleven formulas deduced in X University. As for "clear thinking," "unified purpose," "coherence," and "persuasive power"—wait a while; expect nothing but a tincture of these virtues, and expect them to blossom in themes only gradually as you learn how to cultivate them. Every good teacher since time began has "socialized" his classes so far as he had skill, and has regarded every worth-while assignment as a sort of "project," a real undertaking in a real life. But there is no modern recipe for converting any class into a socialized group that is absorbed in projects; success is a matter of tactful adjustment to the temper of the school in which you find yourself. Don't expect to remove errors from themes by the use of interesting topics or by telling pupils that "errors interfere with our understanding of what you say"; you could as well hope to clean house by lecturing the dust. And don't—in the name of all your dearest hopes of success—don't plan to thrill your class by your

cleverness in presenting a piece of literature. If you are honestly and subconsciously excited by a passage of the lesson, perhaps your feeling will work upon the class. If you pose or contrive, though ever so slightly, the class will sense artificiality and will be alienated from you and the lesson.

Of course you cannot take in or credit such a mass of negatives dumped before you in a minute. They are spread out here merely as examples of how far your heavenly concepts may be at variance with the earth to which you have now descended, and of how different some time-honored maxims may be from the realities of the classroom. Reasons for the "don'ts" will be unfolded in separate chapters, where you will have time to examine them critically and reject as much as you think best. You are now on earth, where your path must be determined by mere physical dingles and dells of a tangled wood, where you must *walk* instead of soaring on golden wing or guiding a fiery-wheeled throne.

You have noticed, and you will frequently see as you read on, that I have a tendency to contradict what you have thought authoritative. Be assured that I am not the kind of person who likes to shout that all the world is mistaken. By nature I am conservative and like to travel the beaten path of authority; I never on any account shall obtrude here an opinion that is merely my own. Every protest is backed by the convictions of many teachers. A novice who is forewarned of these opinions will more easily find the way to the palace of Carelessness and more readily learn how to undo the enchantments.

CHAPTER III

THE WONDERS OF SPELLING

Suppose that some morning when you go into your recitation room to meet a freshman class, you find this note on your desk: "The nekst grammar lessun wood be too long for wun day, but it is all right for too days." Here you are staring at some wonders of spelling. You ought to sympathize with the writer because our unphonetic language has betrayed him into errors; you may breathe a prayer for simplified spelling; you will perhaps feel an impulse to put upon the board *to, too, two* and give a little talk on the distinctions between the preposition, the adverb, and the numeral adjective; possibly you will decide, then and there, to drill one minute each day for a week on the word *lesson,* because it is so common and ought to be mastered by every high-school student.

Of course I am indulging in pure fancy as to what thoughts might flit through your mind if you encountered this exhibit of ignorance. How far wrong is my fancy? Make an experiment, which may be valuable, by observing the misspellings carefully and noticing what feelings you have about them and how you would attack them as teaching problems. Don't turn the page until you have made some definite record of your state of mind as you ponder "lessun," "wood," and "too."

* * *

If you already have a slight acquaintance with the spelling problem, your only feeling about the note is that no

student could possibly have written it; no James Russell Lowell could have written it, no editor or novelist or grocer or professor or judge. That particular assortment of right and wrong forms could not possibly have been compiled by anyone except some teacher of secondary English. You may not in twenty years ever see one of those rare errors ("nekst," "wood," "wun," "too days"); whereas if half the students in your classes this year always spell correctly the other words of the note, you are dealing with such a well-trained group that they will not teach you much about the wonders of the ordinary spelling problems.

I do not pretend to know all about the wonders; there are no books that record them and no teacher's experience that is broad enough to cover them. All I can do is to set forth what my two eyes have seen and my astonished brain has tried to interpret. Take none of my explanations on trust —however positively I may state them—but consider them as starting-points for your own observation. Take no explanation on trust—no, not the most learned monograph of the most eminent scholar; for no man has yet shown that he has fathomed the mysteries. The scholars can give you the deductions from vast quantities of carefully compiled data; the teachers can give you personal impressions; and neither sort of evidence is complete. The teacher's data may be few and ill-assorted; the scholar's interpretation may be wide of the classroom facts.

In reading this chapter by a teacher you should make allowances for narrowness of view—but not too much allowance, as this illustration will show: When I have read that a certain investigator's conclusions are based on fifteen million words of theme-writing from four states, I gasp at the hugeness of the pile of data; then I do a little figuring; I find that even in my small teacher's life I have read more than fifteen million words of the composition of boys who

come from the schools of forty states, and I have an intimate, daily acquaintance with the types of errors and the types of boys who make them. It is as if I had stood in awe of a traveler who had covered a hundred thousand miles in Pullman cars and then had found that my own feet, tramping to and fro in the country, had borne me farther than the traveler had whirled in his express trains.

1. Some Misspellings May Be Phonetic

We can guess, but we have no proof, that "artic" has lost its *c* because the *c* has almost disappeared from the spoken word, that "atheletic" has an excrescent *e* because the word is often wrongly pronounced in four syllables. For aught I know there are other misspellings which originate in errors of pronunciation: "disasterous," "enterance," "reconize," "obstinent," "peticular," "goverment," "transalation," "supprise."

Yet no proof has ever been given that these errors, which appear so obvious to most teachers, are cases of transfers from the hearing region of the brain to the writing region. Think what such a transfer would mean. In the first place, the student would have to analyze the sound of the word into syllables, which is quite a mental feat, as you may see if you will try to analyze the sounds of *hinderance* and *hindrance*, deciding which spelling is correct. In the second place, the student would have to reason that the middle syllable must be represented by an *e* before the *r*—quite a mental feat, if you recall that this student never feels the need of such an *e* when he writes *theatre;* he never uses *theater*.

Of course arguments are rising to your lips. Dismiss them temporarily. Keep your mind open. Attend to the facts in the next section.

2. Some Misspellings Are Not Phonetic

A woman whose enunciation is precise once said to me, "I shall never feel sure how to spell *probably*—whether it has double *l* before the *y*." I replied that she had clearly pronounced the *b* before the *l* and asked how she could possibly be in doubt about writing it. "I don't know," was her only answer; "my mind has always been mixed up; it always will be."

The longer you question students about their misspellings, the more you will find that their minds are mixed up and that they cannot reason from sounds to forms. I have repeatedly shown boys the "preformance" that they have written, asking them to pronounce the queer word. They do not recognize anything queer in the arrangement of the letters, and they pronounce their *pre* as *per*. It is a decided effort, a contortion of the mind, for them to force their tongues to say what their ears have never heard—"pre." I have often tried to coax a boy into saying the "prehaps" that he has written, but have never succeeded without much labor. The poor speller has hardly any power to reason from his form to his sound; he never seems to have gone over the path from form to sound, in either direction. It is his type of mind, unable to distinguish between *per* and *pre*, which writes "enterance." Why should it have such subtlety at one time and be so utterly obtuse at another?

Consider the most common and troublesome word of this sort, *interest*, which is regularly written "intrest" by a large percentage of students. Those who write it in two syllables may speak it quite distinctly in three. Pronunciation is here opposed to spelling. Has anyone ever explained why the pronunciation operates in "enterance" but fails to operate in "intrest"?

Not infrequently a boy writes "finially," has a fixed habit

of inserting the *i* after the *n*. If he is asked to pronounce his form, he says *finally*, in three syllables; and only if he is forced, sound by sound, to practice on *fin*, then *fin+i*, then *fin+i+al*, will he at length achieve a faltering and unintelligent pronunciation of what he has written.

A student who writes "captian" and "villian" will pronounce his blunders just as he would pronounce *captain* and *villain*, without recognition of the transposed vowels. He cannot pronounce the "occassion" which is a habit of his pen any more than he could pronounce the "pasion" which he never writes. The girl who uses a double *s* for a *zh* sound in *occasion* will use a double *s* for an *s* sound in "dissapear," but she does not see what you are driving at when you inquire about the sounds of her blunders. How am I to find in these facts any reason to suppose that she can associate sounds and forms? How can "dirigable" and "vegatable" have any phonetic associations if the student who habitually writes them would give the *g* in *gable* and *gat* a hard sound? If you think of "shure" as a phonetic attempt, why do you suppose that this discriminating student never in his life has put the same *h* in *assure* or *pressure?* What phonetic effort are a third of all our high-school students making when they insist on writing "buisness"? I have never been able to extract the slightest confession from any misspeller that he was in the remotest way thinking of any sound whatsoever when he used *ui* in "buisness" or "minuite." The only explanation ever offered is "Oh, gee! I don't know" or "Oh, gee! I forgot!" "Fourty" and "amoung" are familiar errors; why does an ear-minded student choose *ou* to represent two such different sounds? A poor speller who regularly writes "accostumed" supposes he has indicated the sound of *accustomed*, and is quite unable to associate his form with a person who is costumed for a masquerade. A boy might write, "He dosen't need a second dose," with-

out the least consciousness that he has been phonetically inconsistent. No poor speller can pronounce his "libuary" or "sincerly" or "definately" or "peacable." If you make him pronounce such a series as *bangle, dangle, fangle, jangle, mangle, wrangle,* and then ask him to read his "angle that wrestled with Jacob," his tongue will tell you about an *angel,* and he will not see any sense in your rigmarole of preparation for *angle.* This kind of student will write "stoped" and "beggining" and "dinning-room" without any reference to the way he would pronounce *hoped* or *tobogganing* or *sinning.*

A multitude of illustrations flock to my mind as I recall the evidences of twisted eyes. I must content myself with citing only three.

The first is a story told me by a teacher. In girlhood she had been accustomed to seeing Southern Pacific signs, "Attend to Derailing Switch." For years she saw them, and through all the years supposed that the third word was "Dearling." She was not sleepily inattentive, but used to wonder what a "Dearling" switch was, supposing that it was something comparable to "Deering" plows. Not till she had graduated from a university did she fix her eyes on the word, letter by letter, and see "Derailing." Her eyes had transposed the *a* and failed to count an *i.* Never had her ears heard a wrong pronunciation.

A history teacher was once confiding to me some of his woes caused by the misspellings of *Mediterranean* and *Peloponnesus* and *Boeotia.* Of course he believed that wrong pronunciation caused the wrong spellings. So I plotted an experiment as a demonstration of the opposite idea. On a blackboard in an empty classroom I wrote the made-up form "Beotia" and covered it with a sheet of paper; after a class of thirty ninth-grade boys had filed in, they were told to look hard for five seconds; when the paper was with-

drawn, they stared with all their eyes; then while a teacher kept guard to see that nobody so much as whispered a pronunciation, the boys filed out to me in a corridor and one by one spoke the name (which, we learned later, not one of them had ever heard); fourteen began "Boe." *Boeotia* is a demon to teachers of history, who believe to a man that wrong pronunciation causes the inversion of the first two syllables; yet here was proof that the inverting eye causes the tongue to twist. Was my historical friend persuaded? Not at all.

The third example of how eyes create forms came to me in a conversation with a professor of psychiatry and his wife. He had paid some attention to the spelling problem; both felt a pride in spelling well. When I alluded to "alright," they failed to understand me; they doubted whether "alright" was a mistake. Now it is extremely unlikely that either of them has seen "alright" in print six times in his life; thousands of times they had seen *all right;* the thousands had had no power to displace the phantom.

As the years go by and I constantly see the inability to associate a form with a sound, my belief in the phonetic element of misspelling oozes away. I once had the belief—just as you and most teachers have it; it was an axiom to me; I never questioned it. The facts of the classroom demolished it. I have taught much more effectively since I deserted the axiom and allied myself with the facts.

3. The Most Unphonetic Words Are Least Misspelled

Understand that in this chapter, and especially in this section, I am speaking of high-school facts. Conditions below the junior high-school years are very different, as I will explain in the next section, page 45.

In grades seven to twelve we very seldom see a misspelling of such monstrously unphonetic words as *door* and *do*. Dwell upon that fact for a moment and see its bearing. If pupils make phonetic efforts, we should expect to find some of them striving for consistency in representing sounds by "dore" and "doo." But I have rarely seen the former and have never seen the latter. Heedless boys and careful boys alike are quite content with *do* and *door*.

I have never had to worry about *come* and *some* and *done;* the fact is that poor spellers never associate these forms with the sounds of *home* and *dome* and *bone*. If any student ever complained about the unfairness of the vowel sounds in *done, none, gone,* and *tone,* I should know that he had philological instincts of a high order. The average boy could hardly understand such a complaint, and no poor speller could ever originate it. All boys that I have ever taught write *done* and *none* and *gone* and *tone* without a protest, faultlessly, easily. Almost as much can be said for the medley of *ough* words. To be sure, we sometimes see "enuf" and "ruff" (and suppose they are phonetic efforts), but these errors are not persistent; the average student manages his pen quite unconcernedly and correctly through the maze of *enough, rough, trough, through, although, bough,* and *ought.* Oddities like *would, could,* and *should* are mastered by the dullest of poor spellers, who never show any impulse to write "it wood be" or "the pile of firewould."

I have never seen a *w* supplied for *one* or *once,* nor a *u* to represent the vowel sound, nor the *w* omitted from *write* and *wrong;* nor have I ever heard the unphonetic forms objected to or referred to in any way. Even when a poor speller has to write such combinations as "won one game," "the dove flew over the flood," "I had a fly in my eye," confusion is not caused. The boy who cannot learn to put the phonetic *e* on the end of *before* will probably write the

mysterious *e* and *a* of *beauty* without a quiver. Only occasionally does a high-school teacher see anything but the correct *o* of *woman* and *women;* the freakish shift of sound from *woo* to *wi* has no lasting effect on writing. But the change of vowel in the second syllable, so normally parallel with *men*, causes numerous errors.

What do you make of these facts? You ought not to accept my interpretation unhesitatingly, for you do not know how prejudiced an observer I may be or what other facts I overlook or how I may pervert what I have seen. Mere cold facts in a book should not persuade you. Put your own eyes to use; as the weeks go by, keep a record of the misspellings of the very unphonetic words and see what efforts high-school students make to conform their spellings to the sounds; if you can secure as many as a dozen examples, see whether any of them are persistent errors, like the "demons" described in Section 8, page 54. If any teacher can gather evidence of real demonic trouble caused by words that are spelled in a freakishly unphonetic way, I should be grateful if he would let me see it. I never could find any.

4. Trouble-spots: The Difference Between the Grades and the High School

At this point in the treatment of high-school spelling I should explain that spelling in the lower grades has a very different aspect. I have never seen any description of this difference or any recognition of its existence; but it looms so large and plain that I must try to describe it. You will understand that I am not an expert in pedagogy, have no knowledge of grade work, and do not pretend that I can make a scientific analysis. The facts are reported by so many accredited investigators that they seem

indubitable. I shall quote my figures* from Ernest J. Ashbaugh's *Bulletin of the Extension Division,* Indiana University, Vol. V, No. 1.

In my secondary work I have seldom seen *picture* misspelled; I should guess that every one of the rare errors was made by some backward eighth-grade boy. But Ashbaugh found it misspelled fifty-five times out of two hundred attempts by fourth-grade children, and in thirty-four different ways. Out of two hundred attempts to spell *extreme* in the fourth grade, there were one hundred seventy errors, of fifty-nine different kinds; *recommend* was misspelled one hundred eighty-seven times in one hundred nine ways. Here is a glimpse into a region of pedagogy which bears no resemblance to the field where I work. The only misspellings of *extreme* that I can recall are occasional vagaries like "extreem" or "exstreme"; these forms are not persistent; the word never attracts attention by the worry it causes. *Recommend* is perpetually attracting attention, and always for one of two reasons—that the *c* is doubled or the *m* is single.

Why is there such a striking difference between conditions in the fourth and the ninth grade? The answer seems to be clearly indicated by the rest of the Ashbaugh tabulations. It would appear that in the fourth year, when a word like *recommend* has seldom been attempted by pupils, their efforts to spell it are mere wild thrashing about in a tangle of possibilities; that after two years of growth in knowledge sixty per cent of these aimless trials have disappeared; that after four years of school training ninety per cent of the trials have vanished, never to be seen again; and that after four years three-fourths of the errors are centered in the *c* and the *m*'s.

*I regret that the later and more extended researches of Dr. Ernest Horn, of the University of Iowa, are not tabulated when this book goes to press. His findings will be of great value to all students of the spelling problem.

There are reasons for believing that a similar process governs all the learning of spelling. Early errors, when a word is unfamiliar, are not significant and may not harden into habits. Suppose, as an example, that a fourth-grade teacher sees "sepparat," "seprit," "seperate," "seaprite," and "sepprate"; these five errors look equally important, except that "seperate" is nearest to the correct form. Yet all the more ugly-looking mistakes will evaporate, even if no attack is made upon them; there is nothing substantial about them, no enduring force. All future danger is concentrated in "seperate," in that one spot, the letter *e*. That is our "trouble-spot." We cannot be interested if an investigator says, "Look at my data and see how the scholarly evidence proves that trouble-spots do not exist." We cannot dispute evidence and do not in the least understand the mystery, but we know of a surety that a trouble-spot exists in *separate*. There is strong evidence—for example, in Bernard M. Sheridan's *Speaking and Writing English*—that the trouble-spots are prominent even in the lower grades. In high school we know nothing but trouble-spots. Experience is a cheat if our whole strategy is not to be based on teaching the *a* of *separate* and *grammar*, the *e* of *describe*, and the first *r* of *surprise*. If this is not the truth, then we are all blind and our senses are topsy-turvy.

Every experienced high-school teacher knows that the spelling problem will never be solved except by the following program: to publish a list of the high-school trouble-spots, to discover how early these begin to appear in the grades, to enlist grade teachers in the war against them, to anticipate them wherever possible, to fight them down while they are new, and to focus all later efforts on the few special trouble-spots that cause all the real mischief in higher classes.

5. Trouble-spots in Unaccented Syllables

If you consult a dictionary while you read this section, you will destroy any useful idea that may be here. Should you feel any doubts about spellings as you read the next paragraph, don't look the words up. Wait until you have finished the section; then verify every word that is commented on.

You know that from the Latin *sustineo*, *sustinens* is derived the noun *sustinence;* you know that if you did your whole duty as an English teacher, you would always enunciate precisely the *i* and the *e* in the unaccented syllables. When you use the noun *principal*, do you conscientiously say *pal* for the last syllable, or do you slur it to the same sound that you give to *ple* in *principle?* What sound do you give to the second *e* in *emenate* when you are speaking with precision? Is it ĕ or more like a quick ē? Test your pronunciation and see what sound you use. In the case of the adjective *dependent* and the nouns *dependant* and *dependance* are you conscious that you do actually form the vowel sounds of the last syllables? What sound do you use in the second syllable of *rep* ( ) *tition?* Is it ĭ or ē? What is the second vowel in *alk* ( ) *line?* If you really seek for answers to these questions, you will learn much.

If a person is a very precise pronouncer, he will not see the drift of the previous paragraph. He does not realize that some college graduates, who have specialized in English, do not know what the second vowel of *rep* ( ) *tition* is, and that their pronunciation is so slurred and hurried that they have no clear memory of the sound they give to the vowel. They cannot learn the spelling from their pronunciation. Neither could I, for that matter; not until I got up a mnemonic device, a sound that no one ever uses in that syllable, could I remember the vowel. We are very fortunate, we

poor pronouncers, because we thoroughly sympathize with the students who have no auditory memory, and so we have a better chance to learn how to appeal to them. The precise person, with his clean-cut sounds and memories, can never understand the stupidity of students. (Note: There is irony in this paragraph. Did you detect it?)

Of course he would see through the poor little trick of mixing up correct and incorrect spellings in the second paragraph of this section. He would know whether *sustinence* is right or wrong, and *principal* and *emenate* and *dependance*. Or, if he felt a moment's hesitation, about the third word, he could decide by the sound whether the correct form was *emanate* or *emenate* or *eminate*. But many of us teachers have such poor ears that we are not able to do anything of the sort. Whenever I am at a loss for the vowel of an unaccented syllable, I am helpless until I look in the dictionary. My *ants* and *ents*, my *ables* and *ibles*, sound just alike.

Perhaps a majority of English teachers have a theory that we *ought* to pronounce the *a*'s and *e*'s and *i*'s distinctly. Even teachers who make no pretense to such severe carefulness usually concede that the distinct utterance would be a virtue. But I can make no such concession. I should sound affected to myself if I made unaccented syllables distinct, and should expect my friends to laugh at me. So I take refuge in the judgment of the *Century Dictionary*, which declares in its Preface: "To pronounce the vowels of unaccented syllables as if they were accented would be a caricature of English speech." Its Key to Pronunciation says, "A double dot under a vowel in an unaccented syllable indicates that, even in the mouths of the best speakers, its sound is variable to, and in ordinary utterance actually becomes, the short *u*-sound." The *Century* judges that the final syllables of *dependant* and *dependent* are actually pro-

nounced just alike by cultured people. Hence, the *Century* editors would say, there is no possibility that anyone who speaks normally could tell from the sound he makes whether the vowel is *a* or *e*.

Suppose that the *Century* is wrong, that all of us slurring pronouncers are unworthy, and that the right sort of teacher does distinguish between *ant* and *ent*. Those three suppositions prove nothing about the ninety-nine per cent of students who do not distinguish in their speech. They have never made sounds that can guide them to correct spelling. It is highly unlikely that they can be trained, or ought to be trained, to make such sounds as the *Century* calls "a caricature." What is even more to the point in this discussion, the slurred sounds cannot have caused the wrong spellings. Nearly all students give the same sound to the last syllables of *independent* and *accident*, yet the poor spellers among them prefer to write "independant" and hardly ever write "accidant."

I am always suspicious of logic when applied to so intricate a subject as spelling; I put no reliance in the logic I have just used, and neither should you. But I have stated one fact that deserves attention. After you have observed a dozen similar cases, then a hundred, you will begin to make the inference from which I could never escape: Spelling errors in unaccented syllables have no evident relation to the sounds.

6. Unnatural Pronunciation May Help to Teach Spelling

If I say to a class, "Put a dent in your mind; learn 'in de pen *dent*','' I create a comical association which will become so strong in some minds that they can never pre-

pare to write the word without recalling "dent." If I appeal to the sound of *necesse*, pronounced as Latin, and then, pointing to the syllables, say slowly "ne *cess* a ry," my wrong accent and wrong vowel sounds and *k* sound for *c* will not appear in themes thereafter; the sounds do not transfer to the letter-making part of the brain. But the unnatural sounds appear to become a memory, associated with the correct letters that were seen, and to have a good deal of power to recall the correct letters. Wrong sounds are very useful allies in correcting trouble-spots—for example, in *gram mär, de fi nīte, fi nal'ly, mi nūte, day scribe* (for a class that knows *de* in Latin), *o ri gin'al ly.*

But I will not show or name any wrong letter. You will never understand my fear of doing so until you have your first experience of hearing from a student, "Oh, I thought you said there *was* a k in *necessary.*" Every visual appeal must be to the correct letters. An oral appeal may be very effective if it is wildly incorrect.

7. How Are Trouble-spots Formed?

Nobody knows how trouble-spots originate, but any reasonable being who looks at the evidence must be assured that they spring from fixed, definite causes which tend to operate alike on *all* human eyes. Suppose that an experimenter should make a trip across the country, visiting high schools and dictating this sentence to every ninth-year class *that has not been specially drilled on certain words:* "The next grammar lesson would be too long for one day, but it is all right for two days." When he tabulated the results from the first thousand pupils, he would find some such list as this: "grammer" 238 times, "to" (for *too*) 261 times, "alright" 342 times, all other misspellings 47. His list from

the second thousand would be almost the same, and so it would be for all subsequent thousands. He could learn to predict the ratio of errors. Therefore he could not conceive that they are due to local or variable causes. He must suppose that they arise from some universal and unvarying condition.

In 1914 (*English Journal* for October) I hazarded a guess at the cause. Every year of observation since then has made the guess seem more like a reasonable hypothesis. Because I have not heard of any other explanation, and because my theory seems to check accurately with experience, I offer it with increased confidence.

. . . Consider "seperate," the most ineradicable error in school writing, known and striven against in every school in the country, which everywhere appears with that erroneous vowel, and nowhere (in high school) appears with any other error. Such absolute uniformity cannot be caused by chance; it must be caused by some influence that operates everywhere alike on pupils' eyes. Is not the explanation to be found in the "perate" of *operate, coöperate, temperate, exasperate, desperate?* We shall affirm this until some other plausible reason is proposed. It is common belief, and doubtless correct, that "alright" is produced by *already, almost,* etc. Presumably "discribe" is caused by the numerous *dis* words, "devide" by the *dev* words, and "definate" by the numerous words ending in *ate.* The curious demon "accross" is no longer a mystery when we discover that in the *Century Dictionary* there are thirty-four columns of words beginning *acc.* If hosts of words end in *er,* and if we have hardly any acquaintance with words ending in *ar,* the careless eye of youth naturally assumes "grammer" and writes it hundreds of times. Perhaps that *e* is only one of fifty-seven varieties encountered in the sixth grade, hence gets scant attention, and hence is left unmolested to establish itself; all the other fifty-six competing errors evaporate, but "grammer" hardens into flint. You may go through the whole list of demonic misspellings and hardly find a case that cannot be

explained by the commonness of parallel forms. As one instance: in twenty years no senior in my school has ever misspelled *Macrobius*, though I have never said a word about it; but my most violent demonstrations cannot establish *Macaulay*. The reason is obvious: *Macrobius* has no competing forms to cause confusion; *Macaulay* has half a dozen that are extremely common. *Carpenter* never causes anxiety, but *shepherd* is almost unspellable because of the confusing proper names *Shepard*, etc. With a few possible exceptions like "atheletics," I find that my hypothesis always fits: there is always a *build* to cause "buisness," or a *young* to cause an "amoung," or a *sent* and *went* to cause "ment," or *aren't* and *haven't* to cause "dosen't," or a lot of *supp* words to produce "supprise." There is always a particular reason that fits the general hypothesis.

Possibly the hypothesis goes too far because I am an "eye-minded" person; it may well be that my own type of mentality prevents me from paying enough attention to the auditory element. But I have tried to be wary. I have questioned boys and have sought for examples of the effects of mispronunciation. Examples always remain dubious. How can I be sure that "artic" is produced by an auditory effect? Why may not *article* and all the *arti* words have induced "artic" by a visual process? If the eye of childhood constantly sees *e* after *th*, and if its fingers trace *the* thousands of times a year, why should not that habit induce an *e* in "atheletics"? The combination *cogn* is unusual in youthful reading, but *con* is seen thousands of times a month; why might the eyes not produce "reconize"? Even in those cases where I cannot imagine a visual cause—like "peticular" and "repitition"—I must be cautious about assuming an oral transfer that I cannot find elsewhere. It is a cautious judgment which decides that visual confusion has probably caused ninety-eight per cent of all the typical wrong habits in spelling.

8. Jones's Demons

The best known and most fruitful report ever made on spelling was *Concrete Investigation of the Material of English Spelling,* by Professor W. Franklin Jones, in November, 1913. I quote some bits from his findings:

1. Indeed the very words that give most trouble in spelling are almost invariably found in the second- or third-grade lists, and faithfully reappear throughout the subsequent years. Over nine-tenths of all words misspelled by the 1050 grade students are found in these two lists.
2. From the standpoint of usefulness this second-grade list is worth many times as much as all the other lists combined.
3. Since these troublesome but useful words are not pointed out and effectively dealt with in these early grades, our handling of the most dangerous spelling material is not efficient, and students go on misspelling, year after year, words that should be mastered in the early school years.
4. Since grade students commonly use from 500 to 2500 words in writing, yet on the average misspell but about fifty words, not one child out of a thousand misspelling as many as one hundred words, our spelling problem is not so gigantic as it is commonly believed to be, for the reason that a handful of words misspelled over and over by each student has misled us in our judgment.
5. The twenty-words-a-day lesson should disappear.

The value of Jones's pamphlet lay in the statement that "our spelling problem is not gigantic." Professor Jones found the problem *fiendish* in nature; he dubbed the small group of trouble-makers "demons"; and his name was everywhere hailed by experienced teachers as a fitting one. "Demon" is now a standard term in pedagogy. He selected the following hundred common words as specially demonic and introduced them with the statement "order

not significant after the first four" (*which, their, there,* and *separate*). I have alphabetized his list for easy reference.

ache	could	here	read	too
again	country	hoarse	ready	trouble
always	dear	hour	said	truly
among	doctor	instead	says	Tuesday
answer	does	just	seems	two
any	done	knew	separate	used
been	don't	know	shoes	very
beginning	early	laid	since	wear
believe	easy	loose	some	Wednesday
blue	enough	lose	straight	week
break	every	making	sugar	where
built	February	many	sure	whether
business	forty	meant	tear	which
busy	friend	minute	their	whole
buy	grammar	much	there	women
can't	guess	none	they	won't
choose	half	often	though	would
color	having	once	through	write
coming	hear	piece	tired	writing
cough	heard	raise	tonight	wrote

The general thesis of the *Concrete Investigation* is the most important idea that we teachers can have about our problem, but some of the details of the list of demons are not reliable guides in high-school work. For example, *which,* at the head of the list, is a very mild little imp, and I have seldom seen *could* or *would* misspelled. In high school we have no serious trouble with *any, been, done, early, every, many, much, once, some, they, though, through, tonight, very, write;* and I have never had to worry much about *blue, buy, color, country, dear, easy, guess, half, heard, just, none, often, raise, shoes.* Probably a third of the Jones list are not demonic. Four of them are not common

enough to be classed as demons: *ache, cough, hoarse, sugar.* And some of the most feared demons are not entered in the list: *across, asks, athletics, definite, disappear, disappointed, finally, its, led, occurred, paid, really, seize, sense, stopped, toward, tries, until, weird.*

Yet the Jones list has marked an epoch in teaching by fastening attention on the most important principle: our task is not huge, but narrow and supernaturally difficult.

9. The Fundamental Importance of Demonism

No novice teacher can possibly credit the theory of demonism. It must seem fantastic and partial to anyone who has not lived with the facts for many years. Hence it is useless for me to wax loud and insistent in this closing section. I shall simply summarize what experience proves to most hard workers in high school.

(*a*) It seems to be true that poor pronunciation has only slight effect in creating errors of spelling, that there is hardly any relation of sounds to forms in the minds of students, that misspellings originate in confusion of visual images, that the treatment of misspellings must be some kind of visual emphasis upon the right forms. (See the next chapter, page 60.)

(*b*) Every demon is a typical, specific form of error which occurs with about the same frequency and the same degree of power in all schools alike.

(*c*) If an error is not of this typical sort, not specific and habitual, it is an insignificant fault upon which no time need be spent.

(*d*) The demons are few in number. We do not yet know enough about them to make computations, but the following ratios represent roughly my own feelings about the scale of demonism: a complete eradicating of the fifty

worst demons would probably rid high-school composition of thirty per cent of the spelling errors; eradicating the next fifty demons might rid composition of fifteen per cent more of the errors; and each fifty of the next two hundred demons might account for ten per cent of the errors; there are hardly more than three hundred words which deserve the name of demons; perhaps all the thousands of words outside these three hundred do not cause fifteen per cent of all high-school blunders in spelling.

(*e*) The reason for this extraordinary centering of blunders in a small group of words is that these words are *common.* Of course there are demonic possibilities in hundreds of words that are seldom used by high-school writers—as college instructors find in history papers and physics notebooks and economics tests. But these are so infrequently used in school or in ordinary adult correspondence as to be almost negligible. And very few of them are seen by college instructors in English; the demons which distract professors and business men alike are the same old familiar school demons.

(*f*) The right strategy against demons is to concentrate upon *common* words that are *commonly* misspelled, to clear up the prevalent errors first, not to run hither and yon, sniping at whatever appears, but to clear the field of the swarm of well-known mistakes. For one example: "curtian" may have all the potentialities of the demon "certian," but the noun *curtain* is seldom used and cannot cause a hundredth part of the errors that will arise from the much-used adjective *certain.* As another illustration: "sepparate" is an excessively rare mistake, with no power for harm; "seperate" is an excessively common mistake with infinite power for evil. Samples of a third type of negligible errors are "judgement" and "visiter"; since there is some dictionary warrant for them, we do not say much about them before

the class. In every case of misspelling we inquire, "Is this a common word? Do many students misspell it? Do they unite on some one form of error?" If the answer to any one of the three queries is no, we refuse to spend precious time on the blunder.

(*g*) Only rarely is there a local demon. *Prairie* may be so commonly used in Kansas and may be so frequently misspelled that it deserves much attention; but it should not draw the fire of a Vermont teacher who sees it only three times a year.

(*h*) Any teacher who directs all his energy at demons will, in three different ways, be far more effective than if he attacks along the whole front: First, he will make a far greater reduction in the total of errors; second, he will root out more of those errors that are most noticeable and unpardonable; third, he will do far more to revolutionize the mental habits of students, to alter their attitude toward the whole question of spelling, so that they begin to understand what shame is and what victory is.

The greatness of the gain which comes from a mastery of a few hundred words, how it permeates and fructifies spelling ability for all the other thousands of words, is as mysterious as it is true. In theory it is preposterous; as a report from us who observe in the schools it is incredible to the layman; even we who report are dazed when we see in type what we have said. Yet I must believe it so long as I give credence to my senses. If any student can be trained to spell infallibly, while he composes a first draft, three hundred selected common words, and to form by correct, undeviating habit a dozen kinds of derivatives, he will never appear to be a poor speller. No one knows why that is true. We can only imagine some such process of education as this: Suppose a poorly trained student at the beginning of his ninth year; he is possessed by the ordinary

legion of demons; the teacher exorcises "alright" and "to" and "seperate"; of course they return again; again they are banished and the victim is warned that he will be penalized for a second return; he is penalized, grows wary, and finally is victorious. This petty conquest is significant, for education has begun, and the mind is adjusted to a new ideal of responsibility and power. When "stoped" and "discribe" and "grammer" have been overcome, the mind has acquired a vital sense of caution; it can no longer write heedlessly, for at any moment one of the old enemies is likely to be encountered, and the least inattention may cause chagrin. When "trys" and "occured" and "Jone's" are put to rout, the mind is motivated by a new and cogent sense of shame at its ignorance; it becomes hostile to demons and more resolute to oust them. Any student who has mastered, truly mastered, fifty common forms is highly educated in comparison with one who is slipping drowsily through five thousand nouns that produce no mental stimulus. The student who masters one hundred forms has skill for mastering all forms. If he has the will to go on to a mastery of three hundred, he can be captain of his fate thenceforth. That is education; it is mental power. What seemed a dreary little arena of "only three hundred" will appear as a conquest of Canaan.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEACHING OF SPELLING

Since all my knowledge of spelling and all my interest in it come from teaching, I am not really able to classify my thoughts in two systematic divisions. The previous chapter was all suffused with teaching, and this chapter will continue to tell of wonders. But in a general way I have explained the nature of the problem and shall now tell of teaching tactics.

1. Don't Trust to Phonetic Appeal

A good transfer to the business of this chapter is afforded by the propaganda of the Simplified Spelling Board, which I shall speak of at some length, not because it is so important in itself, but because it so well illustrates the teaching problem. All its program of reform is based on the belief that "the child, being gifted with reason, expects to find invariable relationship between the sound of any given word and the letters composing it." What do you suppose a member of the Board would say after reading the previous chapter and hearing that only the rarest and most gifted pupil ever shows any signs of expecting to find such a relationship? I can see only two rational courses open to him: he must decide that I am a madman or that the educational part of Simplified Spelling is founded on pure fancy. And you, my dear colleague, are confronted by the same dilemma. If, after two years of observation,

your eyes see what mine have seen, you will feel no hope in Simplified Spelling. If your eyes can see in school what the Board sees there—then all your spelling troubles will be over; for in any class that "expects to find an invariable relationship" there will be no spelling problem.

Don't suppose that I am overstating or trying to talk smartly. I admire the courage of the Board, respect its scholarship, am not offended by such forms as *hav* and *carrid* and *enuf*, and should enjoy living in a world where we were all at liberty to "spel as we pronounce." I am not even interested to argue here about the practical difficulties that would confront me in themes when I read such phonetic sentences as "It mite uv bin here sins las Sa urday." Nor do I think it would be fair to find fault because the Board puts into one system such antiquities as *whose* and *all* and *column* and *hoped* alongside such novelties as *wer*, *wel*, *cof*, and *concernd*. I can go much farther and say that the life of every English teacher would be more useful if he could allow in school such normalized forms as *iether* and *recieve* and *excede*. Oh, the Board advocates much reform that I wish might prevail.

But its fundamental idea can produce only distraction and damage in actual teaching processes. Its Bulletin of March, 1920, expounds the idea thus:

> It is in considering its relation to education that the broadest and strongest plea can be made. . . . The child, confused and discouraged by the irregularities and contradictions in spelling, and humiliated by the "mistakes" he constantly makes when he attempts to reason. . . . The child is led to put les and les trust in his lôgical faculties in all his studies. . . . As teachers came to realize how much more easily their pupils learned the simpler spellings. . . . Assuming that the use of a rational spelling would effect a saving of a year's time in the grades. . . . the saving in 1920 would be prob-

ably in excess of $100,000,000. . . . A simpler spelling is a les difficult spelling, easier to learn and easier to teach. . . . Slovenly speech is due to present spelling. . . . Every step taken now to simplify English spelling is a step toward restoring the purity and precision of English speech.

The word that describes such a line of reasoning is *automorphism*, which means the process of supposing that other people are like yourself. It is good reasoning when applied to the mature brains of a Brander Matthews or a Grandgent or a Funk; it is nearly true of a class composed of ten-year-old Grandgents and Funks; perhaps it would be fairly true of the best spellers in the grades. It has no relation to the facts that confront a teacher of poor spellers in high school. Our tactics must be worked out for poor spellers. Poor spellers are not confused and discouraged by the words *eye* and *two;* they do not attempt to reason about *people* and *half;* no, they simply spell these irregularities with ease. Unmistakable data about the ease of spelling unphonetic words were published a year before the Bulletin from which I have quoted, in the *University of Indiana Extension Bulletin* No. 55. Ashbaugh there tabulated the findings from 4,750,000 spellings of 3000 words in grades six to eight of one hundred schools, arranging the words in nineteen steps of difficulty—from *if*, *and*, *large*, etc., in Step 1, to *schedule* and *zephyr* in Step 19; *eye*, *two*, *half*, and *people* are all in the third Step, along with *car*, *had*, and *yes*. Ashbaugh, to be sure, announces that his steps "have no bearing upon difficulty of learning," and I must in fairness supply this statement for whatever use anybody cares to make of it. We teachers, however, can properly count a word easy in proportion as it is mastered early. The four words discussed in this paragraph (*eye*, *two*, *half*, *people*) were spelled with ninety-eight per cent of

correctness in the sixth grade, with one hundred per cent of correctness in grades seven and eight.

Suppose, now, that we experiment with average pupils from the sixth grade and ask them "to put more and more trust in their logical faculties" when they use *too* as an adverb of degree. "This word is very short," we say to them, "and absolutely phonetic. Trust your sense of sound. Trust to logic." They are unable to respond. Even when the word is dictated in a list, only seventy-nine per cent of the pupils can spell it, only eighty-eight per cent in the seventh grade, and ninety-four per cent in the eighth. It is in Ashbaugh's ninth Step of difficulty. If we dictate it in sentences, hardly a third of the pupils can spell it in the ninth grade. If we test by proficiency in spontaneous theme-writing, we cannot achieve mastery in the senior year of high school, or in college. *Too* is all but unteachable.

Most of the unteachable words are quite logically formed and have never roused the ire of Simplified Spellers. The Board has never proposed to sanction "seperate," "discribe," "alright," "grammer," or "sentance." If the simplifiers would only take jobs in the ninth grade, they would find that poor spellers will not use logic, cannot even apply the logic that a teacher furnishes ready-made, but seek out all manner of ways to defy logic. They coin—a certain percentage in every school always coin—the unreasonable forms "askes," "befor," "amoung," "with-out," "fourty," "peacable," "occassion," "reccolect," "buisness."

Such facts as these are the only arguments that appeal to my poor brain. Perhaps my sense of logic is defective. Surely something must be wrong with me, for I have never heard anyone reason against Simplified Spelling except on the ground of its radicalism or inconvenience. Yet, for my part, I like its radicalism and should not find it inconvenient. Educators seem to accept the Board's logic

everywhere; teachers' associations in twenty-two states have approved its effort. It seems incredible that they are all wrong. I am not so foolhardy as to set up my opinion against such wide judgment. All I advise in this section is that no teacher should adopt Simplified Spelling until he understands how I misinterpret what seem to me facts. For eight years I have hoped to receive a letter from someone explaining to me how I have strayed into error. If anyone can explain and will do so in a letter, he may be sure of an attentive and teachable reader.

Probably the teachers' associations have voted with a view to philology, to economy in printing, to making the world safe for good spellers. With those purposes we can all sympathize. But don't assume that Simplified Spelling can help the poor spellers; that is the burden of this section. Don't automorphize. Every good teacher of English has an eye for letters and is sensitive to sounds, is shocked or troubled by phonetic inconsistency; so he inevitably attributes the same feelings to poor spellers. He ought to think the other way round: These children regularly violate phonetic consistency, choosing, by some other mode of their minds, to use consistently such forms as "dinning-room," "haveing," "tradegy"; therefore they are different from me. Therefore phonetic aids will be stumbling-blocks to make the way harder for them. I will patiently try to find out how *their* minds work; I will not judge them by my own mental processes.

One illustration must suffice. You and I like the preterits *askt* and *talked;* we realize why the *t* sound is represented by *t* in *hopt* and by *d* in *hoped;* we enjoy doubling the *b* in *stabbed* and not doubling the *p* in *stopt.* We think in terms of sounds. But put yourself in the place of an average pupil; remember that teachers cannot agree whether the final sound of *asked* is *t* or ought to be *d;* realize how the

"simplified" system of past tenses looks to a poor speller. He can see nothing but a maze of sometimes-double-and-sometimes-don't-and-sometimes-the-sound-doesn't. All seems a criss-cross puzzle to him. Our old-fashioned non-phonetic spelling of past tenses is, on the contrary, a consistent scheme of forms, regular and logical. Most of the logic of spelling is on its side.

Spelling is a matter of written forms. If you ask a poor speller to guide himself by sounds—find the conclusion in your own experience. Accept nobody's dictum. As for the inverse process—making American enunciation clean-cut by writing *pronounst* and *faced*—you may have one guess. In so far as a teacher tries to adopt Simplified Spelling as a system, he is in very parlous business and is likely to heap up perplexities on a foundation of blunders. As a general method, as a mode of attack, as a hope, beware of Simplified Spelling.

As a matter of single words, however, you will often find Simplified Spelling a good ally. If a poor speller fancies "thru," encourage him; tell him that he is a sensible chap to discard the evil-looking *through*. Perhaps this will be the first praise he ever had for orthographic cleverness. He might receive such a stimulus that he would take pride, the next day, in discarding "comming." If Clarissa shows a fondness for "stopt," let her know that you have a fellow-feeling; the glow of pride in her mind may so warm her perceptions that next week she will notice her detestable "occured" and will change it to "occurt." The two errors are equally sinful to a philologist, but to a teacher there is an infinite difference. "Occured" is heedlessness; "occurt" is an effort to think. When Clarissa's mind is trying to think, it can be taught to spell. If Nathaniel puts "nite" into a theme, hoping to tease you, commend the alertness of his mind; say that many eminent scholars hope to make

that the official spelling some day. Thus you elevate Nathaniel to the linguistic peerage, and there's no telling what noblesse may oblige him to do with his plebeian habits like "simular" and "enimys." If I could have my own way in a school, I should welcome any forms that had any sanction whatever.

"If I were free." No teacher is free. A democracy is tyrannous in its prejudices. Most of the parents and future employers of students have no sympathy with spelling reform; they are disgusted by its *nite* and *leag* and *commenst.* Even if a teacher has the crusader's spirit and can incite pupils to martyrdom, he has no right to train them in such a way that they will be judged untrained and ignorant. Simplified Spelling has been adopted by only one popular periodical, and has been frowned upon by the National Education Association. Its system is still a mess of contradictions, and its future is not bright. No school is free to antagonize the strong prejudices of a very large majority of the population.

Our freedom is curtailed in another way, less obvious but more important. Since the great bulk of all the reading of students is printed in non-simplified style, we are causing confusion when we ask students to spell one way and read another. If we cultivate *stopt,* and if students forever see *stopped,* the poor spellers are lured toward "stopted" and "stoppet," and we thus produce a flicker before unsteady eyes. Our duty is to make visual images consistent and invariable.

2. Trust in Visual Appeals

When I make the section titles of this chapter imperative, as if I knew certainly about the nature of the spelling mystery, I am not being dogmatic. I am simply making

my personal conviction definite and positive, so that it will stand out clearly as a program. If you accept it uncritically, you are a poor teacher. You can never learn the best way of handling poor spellers by following anybody's directions. Your own sympathetic imagination must be your only guide. Discount your own processes of learning to spell; discount all advice about teaching; make no assumptions; be cautious in making deductions from the queer doings of pupils. Trust only in observing *what* they do and *what device* secures results. If you strive to see sympathetically what actually happens and to form a mental picture of processes different from your own, you are steering toward success. My own long years of blind wrestling with wrong suppositions make me wish for skill to put this advice more convincingly.

All the sympathy and imagination that I can command have shown me one prevailing element behind the eyes of all poor spellers—visual confusion. Perhaps your mind has always been so set toward an auditory element that you cannot appreciate the completeness of my distrust in any such influence. You feel that I am too insistent, and you wonder why I recur to this one point with so much repetition. Bear with me. No other phase of the problem is important compared with this question of what the tongue and the ear have to do with written spelling. I can do no harm by stressing it, and might do harm by dwelling on it less.

"He has a wobbly eye" is the formula that always appears to fit the boy who writes "dosen't" and "origionally." His eye often sees *haven't, weren't, aren't;* it does not look straight at *doesn't,* but wobbles off to the familiar *en't* ending and rests there contented. His eye has often seen *region* and *legion* and *religion;* of course it slides the familiar *gion* into *originally.* What phonetic appeal could I make?

This poor fellow cannot even tell me where the accent falls in *benefit;* he and his tribe do not make distinguishable vowel sounds in unstressed syllables; they say "(?)rijnly" and "r(?)lij(?)sly." If I could spare a week for phonetic drill on the syllables, I could hardly produce knowledge. And since school life has more big jobs than hours for performing them, I must act like a practical workman. I put *gin* on the board, make the student see and write *gin,* let him hear any foolish joke about *gin* that comes to my lips. If he knows the Latin word *origo, originis,* I am almost afraid to show it to him. If I did so, I should be flashing *o*'s before his jumpy eyes; an hour later he would probably have a memory of *rigio, rigionis*—and his latter state would be worse than the first.

If a familiar *gion* has caused "origional," it would be wrong policy to bring that syllable before wavering eyes. Some grown-ups believe that they can learn best by facing such a pair of forms, by distinguishing what has been confused; but I am skeptical. In my own case, if I am trying to learn *emanate* after I have become confused by seeing "emenate" a number of times, I can succeed only by attaching a mnemonic tag to the one letter that I want to retain. I must not keep both letters in mind, but must fix one of them, saying, "It's *a, a, a;* be a *man;* learn *man, manate.*" The efforts that I used to make to help boys distinguish often intensified their trouble; I have never seen harm done by trying to engrave *one* form in memory.

There was a time when I expounded *to, too,* and *two,* supposing that I could set up the distinctions, appeal to logic, supply information; and that process seems to be still the prevailing one in schools. It makes me shudder. In all probability it is the constant sight of *to* in the lower grades which breeds "to good to be true." No wrong logic is involved. There was never any "expectation of

invariable relationship." A perfectly logical and regular spelling was furnished to the child, and the wobbly eye inverted all sense and sound. So I must single out the one most common error and hold the eyes to that. I am not concerned with an occasional misspelling of *to* or *two* or of the *too* which means also. Most of the mistakes center in the misspelling of *too* when it is used to modify adjectives and adverbs. The great need is to harp on *too much, too high, too fast*—on that one correct form. Even if a student should want to inquire about *to*, I should not answer him in class. I will have no sight or sound of the other word when I am exhibiting this word.

If I will not show *to* when I am talking about *too*, you can imagine that I never show *there* when I am impressing *their*. Since the demonism of *their* was probably caused by a mix-up with *there*, I should be confirming error if I said anything about *there*. I want it out of sight, out of mind. *One* image must be intensified: "Look at *they*. Change *y* to *i*, as you are used to doing in many words, and you have *thei*. Add *r*. The pronunciation is . . . ." Then I give an exaggerated pronunciation, t h e y u r, as I point to the right letters on the board.

Most spelling-books give assignments by pairing the confused words: *its, it's; principle, principal; course, coarse.* The arrangement seems so natural and is so economical that many experienced teachers use it in recitations. This method of homonyms is systematically developed in some places and is argued for as a policy; one famous school published a report declaring that the method of homonyms had been proved by a well-controlled experiment to be superior to the method of never showing homonyms together. This is a sample of the contradictions that you will continually see if you read printed advice. Trust nothing in print. Test everything. Build your opinions gradual-

ly from the actions of one and another and another poor speller. Teaching is a personal art, like salesmanship or electioneering. We learn it by a long series of encounters with individuals.

In all other parts of my teaching I am willing to show wrong forms or talk about them. Wrong verb forms, wrong idioms, wrong sentence structure, wrong punctuation are commonly heard and seen; our teaching has to be a contest with these errors that are flaunted on all sides at all times. But a student seldom encounters wrong spelling. Our battle is against phantoms in confused eyes. Never have I succeeded by raising one of these phantoms. I have often succeeded by excluding the phantom and making a fanfare as I introduce the correct form.

If demonism is developed in a word by the influence of a syllable constantly seen in other words, why is there not a good chance that correctness can be developed by the influence of the right syllables frequently shown in other words? When, for example, we try to establish *all right,* we can group it with *all wrong, all over, all in;* we can associate it with a company of "all" phrases, where it belongs. The demon "prehaps" will only rejoice if you enlarge on the differences between *per* and *pre;* he may be exorcised if you keep still about him and talk of "he permits a person to perspire perhaps." If *choose* and *goose* and *loose* and *moose* and *noose* have conspired to produce a misspelling of *lose,* the demon "loose" would like to have you advertise him. Keep him out of harm's way and make no reference to him. Look for the similar forms that will emphasize the right spelling and set up the association of "lose, move, and prove." Put *speak* with *weak* and make a nonsense sentence to rivet them together in memory. Perhaps your dignity would not allow you to say to a class, "We fed and bled and led the mule"; but

that witless aggregation of three similar preterits might teach *led*. For my part, I am always ready to sacrifice dignity in so good a cause.

The pupil who has learned to "put similar forms together" is equipped for battle. If Archie should invent "The demons despair of destroying me," and if you had him tell the class of his device, and if the class began to play with this sort of purposeful nonsense, the demons would tremble. I estimate that the mere grouping of *laid, paid,* and *said* has saved me several hours a year and added to efficiency. Nearly every demon can be put into some such reinforcing group of similar forms.

3. Deep-graven Habits

No layman will ever understand the desperateness of the struggle against demons. Every novice and every lay critic and every theorizer about teaching assumes that spelling is a matter of appeal to reason. The fact is that we are engaged against the supernal power of fixed habit. A child, we may suppose, began to write "discribe" in the fourth grade; his mistake was hardly noticeable among the swarming errors, was not known by the teacher to be of any special importance; he wrote the word dozens of times in the fifth year, more dozens in the sixth year, more frequently each year thereafter; the habit was at first like a groove in soft cement; the cement hardened. Then a ninth-grade teacher told him that the correct sound was *de scribe*—and supposed her work was done. A tenth-grade teacher had him write the word out twenty times, then forty times—and supposed her work was done. They were using scrubbing brushes to erase a letter carved in stone. The *i* will not be removed by anything short of a chisel, and the job may take a year or two.

In any school you may see the deep-graven habits of "ment" and "ommit" and "benifit" and "devide." The teachers may be severe and the pupils conscientious, but the ancient habits may be impregnable. A seeming victory for this month turns into obvious defeat next month. Teachers despair at the helplessness of students; students are stupefied by the uncanny persistence of a blunder that they understand as well as the teacher. Understanding has nothing to do with the case. The enemy is H A B I T, satanic in its power. For fear that you will underestimate the strength of habit if I give illustrations from the lives of pupils, I will cite the defeats of teachers. Here is a capable and intellectual one, a good speller who knows all about demons; she writes "grammer" in a formal university theme. Here is another, a spirited, charming woman, a good speller, who yawns while an instructor lectures about the demon "seperate"; she knows all about it, has taught it for three years; in her final examination for the course she writes "seperate"; the schoolgirl habit still rules her at times. Here is a veteran editor, a scholar, who knows all about the etymology of *definite*, who pronounces it precisely, and who considers that some teachers are over-frantic about the power of bad habits in spelling; when he is writing hurriedly one day, he twice within three hundred words reverts to the boyish "definate." What do you think your nice little wash-cloth of logic, dipped in some suds of phonetics, will accomplish in smoothing out the hard disfigurements of the untrained mind of a careless boy?

The question is not an invitation to pessimism. It points out the worst part of the small field of demonism. If you know the extreme of your difficulties and just where they are and just how limited they are in number, you can be an optimist. Throw away your house-cleaning ap-

paratus, buy a hammer or some dynamite, and go cheerily at the most curious job in pedagogy. The lists of words in sections 10-16 (pages 91-113) will forewarn you of all the real difficulties and tell you approximately how they rank.

Now you will not have to rave at students, as I used to do, because of their supposed stupidity or carelessness. They have engraved minds—that's all. They are afflicted beings who deserve sympathy. If you are a woman, you may find that your tactful sympathy will have a softening effect on cement, so that you won't have to do much work with a horrid hammer and chisel. Experiment with *pity*, which often acts like an acid to dissolve the stone in which bad habits are cut. We all dread to be pitied. If you can be sorry for the poor grooved brains in which demons romp at will, you may learn a technique of gentleness.

4. Carelessness

I am handicapped in my dealing with demons because I never had to overcome one; therefore I have not a lively enough sympathy with the student who must wrestle with "dissapear" or "with-out." But I have been careless. I have a fellow-feeling for the student who "just forgot." Once, in writing to a friend about spelling, I put "picnicing" in a list of forms that I was trying to spell correctly; and I have found, in proof reading my letters, that the second *o* was lacking in a *too* or the *y* in *they*. For such slips, though they are inexcusable, I expect to be pardoned, *if they are rare*. Hence I find it easy to excuse the occasional lapses of a boy. If he has only one or two misspellings in a theme, and if these are not violations of any special taboo, and if his work is otherwise clean, I may pass lightly over his carelessness.

But such leniency is a door through which countless evils may troop into composition. Compare the policy of the readers of Dartmouth freshman themes, who rule that any composition formally prepared out of class is zero in academic value if it contains one misspelled word. Tell that to a convention of English teachers and watch the horror in their eyes. It *is* rather horrible; I cannot subscribe to such a method. Yet it may possibly accomplish some good. It makes to Dartmouth boys a declaration of their responsibility for using a dictionary and for proof reading. It says: "You want a seal of this college on your ability in composition; you must therefore prove that you have had elementary training in common words and that your conscience cares about right and wrong in details. If you are unable or unwilling to conform to this demand, we cannot certify that you are proficient. We cannot condone carelessness."

It is quite unsafe to judge such extreme severity on any basis of abstract justice. Here, as everywhere in our queer profession, we must be prepared to listen patiently to any scheme, no matter how wrong it may seem on general principles. What sounds most rational may prove destructive; what appears outrageous may have a most happy effect. The only criterion for judging is "What are the results?" If I could learn from Dartmouth freshmen that the spelling rule caused them to restrict their vocabularies, I should have grounds for an adverse verdict. If most of them testified that, in fact, they were benefited by it, I should have reason for experimenting in my very different field, a school. Nothing is to be discarded or adopted on trust, but only after it has been tested.

Somewhere on the scale of harshness every teacher must mark for himself the freezing-point for estimating care-

lessness. If we are unduly strict, we outrage every student's sense of fairness and arm him against our purposes; if we tolerate any heedlessness, we are disarming students for the battle of life. Where shall we draw the line? Complicated as the question is, it admits of a rather easy solution for any teacher who has an ordinary amount of common sense in his make-up. As soon as anyone has read, in the next paragraph, a description of what carelessness means in education today, he will not need advice from me.

I once saw, in an exhibition of sixth-grade work at a Texas fair, a water-color of a terrifying dragon, named "Carelessness." I once received from a business office a placard that had been prepared for employees (I think by a chamber of commerce), reading thus:

WHO GOES THERE?

I have destroyed more men than . . .
I am more deadly than . . .
etc., etc.
I am your worst enemy.
I am CARELESSNESS

From grade pupils to presidents of corporations there is general recognition of the truth that carelessness is the prevailing sin among Americans, that education is a pretty dream unless it is a war on carelessness. Every successful teacher I have met believes that her greatest use to society is in advertising Carelessness as a monster. In some ways, to be sure, he is an amiable pet: we may be fond of certain careless friends, and we may dread some careful persons; mere carefulness will not make a girl attractive or a boy successful. But we are not misled by the exceptional persons. We know quite well how

generally it is true that we help a student if we train him to be careful in duties that demand care, and how we beckon him to shipwreck if we encourage heedlessness. Therefore the teaching of spelling is a very different matter from mere fussiness about certain letters. It is an infinitely higher matter. It is part of the strategy in the contest against Carelessness. It is possible, though hard to imagine, that six misspelled words in a long theme might not indicate much carelessness; it is possible, and very easy to imagine, that the misspelling of one word might indicate so much carelessness as ought to be punished by a forty-per-cent reduction in the mark of a theme. All depends on whether carelessness is encouraged. We may excuse six errors or condemn one. The freezing-point on our scale of severity is the place where leniency begins to be dangerous to the pupil, and where a fair-minded pupil will admit the danger. If I lay down a strict law that represents to the class merely my own judgment, I shall be a slave-driver. But if a class has agreed that a heavy penalty is the only fair treatment, I can lead willing followers.

"Just plain carelessness" is less common than you would suppose when you begin a year's work with a poorly trained class. A large part of the mistakes that seem to you so haphazard are demonic—wrong habits that begin in visual confusions of a specific kind. And demonism is an affliction. You must act toward it as a doctor would toward adenoids, not scolding or fretting, but kindly and firmly performing a surgical operation. If you condole with pupils and keep sweet-tempered, you have them at your mercy. Pity is the treatment that makes their minds squirm in wholesome agony. You should be sorry that they have been left untrained, sorry that they are now infected with disease, sorry that demons have gained

possession. You are now to put them into a nice, clean hospital where you will help them to recover their health.

So, at the beginning of your operations, you are treating disease. You show three or four right forms each day, dilating on the correct letters, never by any slightest allusion referring to the wrong letters. You dictate a couple of sentences containing today's words and two of yesterday's. Some of the demonic errors appear once more—and you act like a nurse laying a cool hand on fevered skin. After a week there will be opportunities to inject doses of sugar-coated sarcasm; but this medicine is a delicate adjustment of personality, a tricky drug, and not to be used by a teacher who really feels sarcastic. Trust in pity.

A third or fourth repetition of a wrong spelling verges toward carelessness. For how can the pupil defend himself? If he has not been careless, he must confess that he is pitifully weak. His pride will not let him confess weakness. So you inquire whether carelessness is excusable. He cannot say so. Then put to him the question, "Do you want to conquer your carelessness?" Here you propose a big issue, far beyond any petty case of spelling a word. Morality is involved; a pupil must confess indifference or ask to be penalized in future.

Some such process, first with individuals and then with the class as a whole, puts you into an impregnable position. Often I have found it advisable to stay below a limit of severity that a class would have prescribed for itself as a cure for carelessness. A description of one case will show the method better than pages of generalizing. A certain tenth-year class showed a special weakness for "discribe." Most of the boys had had thorough training in the word the previous year; all had studied Latin and knew about *de* as well as I did; they could not plead

ignorance or lack of drill. In fact they were much harder on themselves than I was; for I knew, as they did not, the satanic power of the wrong habit. So I pitied them, and they writhed. After three special exhibitions of *de+scribo* I asked whether a deduction of twenty per cent from any theme thereafter would be too great a penalty for "discribe." Of course pride forced them to agree that twenty per cent was hardly enough. A week later, after three misspellings in one set of themes, I inquired whether thirty per cent was too severe for the future. A month later, after more of my expostulating on *de*, a fifty-per-cent penalty was slight enough. But the victims of *dis* were still unable to conquer; and by that time it would have been an insult to any boy's mentality to accuse him of being *unable* to use *de*. Oh, no; he must be blamed for carelessness. Things had come to a pass where pity would have been unfriendly and indecent. I therefore did the class the honor to grow angry and to harangue them thus: "If any of you fellows misspell this word in future, you deserve to have one hundred per cent subtracted for the one error. That will be the penalty hereafter. Your parents may think I am crazy for doing this; but any parent who had visited every recitation this year would say that I was crazy not to have done it before. I apologize for wasting time with so much talking. I have quit talking. Now I am going to teach." Every boy knew that the extreme measure was perfectly fair. I had to apply this death penalty three times within a month, and never again. I had been unkind and unwise not to make an end of carelessness long before.

Leniency is likely to be unkindness. It is usually the sort of torture that we inflict when we tenderly remove adhesive tape bit by bit. A surgeon knows better; he gives one quick, steady pull, and produces only a pleas-

ant tingle in the skin. My own error in dealing with carelessness has been to give little, flinching pulls; I ought to have given one strong yank, thus saving time and preventing pain.

That parable states only half of the truth; it covers only the case of carelessness. A fixed bad habit is not like surgeon's plaster. If you should try to jerk away a habit in a moment, you would rip the flesh. When dealing with a demonic habit, we must first soften it with pity and massage it by emphazing the right forms and medicate it with drill. So long as the habit still has potency, we must be lenient; when its recurrence is somewhat due to carelessness, severity must begin; when carelessness becomes the principal cause of error, severity must do its surgical work. All treatment of spelling depends on degrees of carelessness.

5. Spelling Is a Moral Matter

I always distrust a person who talks of education in terms of morality. In my own work I never appeal to morals, and I am not preaching in this section. But I ought to call attention to the fact—whether you and I use it in the classroom or not—that spelling, as a school subject, is a matter of conscience. Elsewhere in the world spelling may be a matter of knowledge, or of pride, or of resolute indifference; in school it is moral. For we pretend to teach it, the public pays us to teach it, pupils agree that they try to learn it, we all pay some deference to spelling in our social code. If we, like some emancipated souls, could declare our freedom from convention, then correct spelling would mean no more than correct cigarette-holders. But anyone who professes allegiance to convention is bound to be loyal to it if he has a sense of

honor. If he professes with his mouth and misspells with his hand, he should be ashamed of his failure and should try to do better. The teacher or the pupil who is not ashamed of failure—finish the sentence according to your own code.

I am not preaching. It never pays a teacher to preach. The purpose of Section 5 is to clear up a common misconception, one that may cause you much uneasiness and dim your eyes and make your heart distrustful. You will encounter many a genial opinion like this: "Spelling is for small souls; Washington couldn't spell; I am a poor speller myself; don't elevate this mucky portion of your subject to such prominence." The man who talks thus will have just the sort of charm that carries an audience and that rallies to itself all esthetically-minded people. We cannot exile ourselves from such company. So we feel dubious about our devotion to spelling. Then when we return to our themes, we are dubious about overlooking misspellings. Our allegiance is divided, our purpose unsure. Unless we understand the moral issue, we must live forever in perplexity.

The plain truth is that Mr. Genial Large Man is talking about mere spelling, spelling *per se*, spelling as a matter of knowledge or esthetics. So speaking, he may be right. Yet, oddly enough, he is offended if his son writes "discribe" and wrathy at the teacher who failed to train his son and contemptuous of a colleague who displays such ignorance. And if ever he had explained to his son the etymology of *de*+*scribo* and had heard his son repeat the facts and had seen his son write *de* ten times and had extracted from him a promise to be decent in future; and if then the son had written "discribe" again; and if four times more, after three more contrite promises to be decent, the son had erred in just the same way—finish the sentence

according to your own knowledge of how esthetic and honorable people act.

In school we live by a social compact, all agreeing that correct spelling of the commonest words is a social demand, that pupils have subscribed to it, that teachers have a duty to enforce it. If, then, we whimsically desert to Mr. Large Man, training students to believe that a compact is a scrap of paper, we are false to duty.

For a quarter of a century I have observed Large Men. They all want spelling and all bargain for it. But they do not know the price. They think it can be had at the expense of a few hours and of some incidental efforts. When I present the bill, they tell me to forget my troubles and be large-minded; they are dishonest. If you can finish that sentence differently, you will never understand morality in spelling.

If any reader supposes that correctness in spelling is in the same moral category as "correct" pronunciation or "correct" idiom, he cannot understand Section 5. A large part of what schools teach about "correctness" in pronunciation and diction is ludicrous rubbish, harmful to good taste and immoral in its effect, as I shall show in Chapter XIII. Usage is unsettled; wild theories run riot, and they are anti-social. But the right spelling of demons is absolutely settled; a school that does not rescue from demonism is abandoning pupils to contempt. It is doing far worse than that. It is teaching them that the difference between right and wrong doesn't matter much. All over this country are thousands of devoted instructors whose instincts will not let them abandon children or teach them immorality.

Does the previous paragraph sound like a rhetorical burst? Ask any teacher who has been working in high schools for twenty years.

6. The Great Motive in Spelling

From those lofty reflections I descend to the low and practical level of the motive that is most effective with pupils. If you are in the right accord with your classes and if they know that you never orate or splurge unless you mean business, you may be able now and then to elevate their minds to the far heights of a social morality. But those are distant and may be snow-clad. The everyday life of labor must have a more immediate and personal urge. I have found this motive in the dread that boys have of being "queer." No boy can stand against the fear that he will be thought "queer"—that is, if a teacher does not utter the word with any threat or false stress. If a boy does not know what a Cadillac car is or what static is, he is queer. Nobody tells him he is a sinner; people just look at him in such a way that he knows he is queer. Social "queerness" is brought home by slight smiles or shrugs. If ever any boy or girl realizes that "Dicken's" will put him on record with the class as a queer creature, the error will melt like ice in an oven.

Of course I am talking about a social reality. We older people are so artificial that we think of creating a make-believe social disapproval in a class. To build an actual disapproval may take much time and tact. A teacher's judgment counts for nothing; only the actual spontaneous desire of a class to snicker will avail. And only a teacher who is in genuine fellowship with the class can foment the snicker and then pity the poor fellow who is snickered at. Quite an art, this. None of us can master it; some had better not try it at all; but most can use it to some extent.

A teacher in Chicago might some day put on the board an address: "Mr. Hiram H. Hyman, Shicago, Ill." The

class would wonder about the *S;* the teacher could ask James Estill what was wrong; James would object to the *S*—and would speak quite scornfully. Then James could be reminded that his way of spelling *sure* in yesterday's test is just as peculiar in a civilized community as the wrong initial for *Chicago.* "It's strange that a fellow who is so dainty about *S* should be blind to *h.* Would he notice if anybody wrote him a letter addressed to J h a m e s? Queer eyes Jim has." If there is—even in the farthest recesses of a teacher's mind—any bitterness in such an attack, any tincture of venom, he will meet the reward due to ill-natured people. But if he is thinking of James with real sympathy for the demon that possesses him, his words will not sound as they look on paper. James will like the treatment. But he will flush and be uneasy. The class is feeling sorry for him. He is "queer."

Just that kind of playing with emotions might not be wise in some classes; irony will go wrong if attempted by anyone who does not instinctively combine irony with friendliness. No method of any teacher in any school can be safely copied by any other teacher in any other school, since all successful pedagogy is an adjustment of personalities. Any effort to imitate a method not native in my own mind will fall flat in my class. The most erratic use of nonsense may succeed in my class if it is a spontaneous effort to make something clear. This section is not advising that a teacher should perform peculiar stunts. Just the contrary. It describes the big, plain, human fact that a misspelling makes a person queer in a conventional world. Spelling is a matter of fixed taboo, and any boy who violates it outrages common custom as surely as if he wore earrings. He discredits himself. A humorous teacher will find a humorous way to bring this fact home. A matter-of-fact teacher will find the facts quite sufficient.

The best trick I know for bringing social disapproval to bear on wrong spelling is to accuse a student of writing outlandish sounds. I say, "Sam tells me that he 'occashionally' saw a heron; Elijah has been 'amowng' the sideshows." May I be excused for saying once more that I do not write one of these phonetic reproductions or name any wrong letter of them? For the brain of every poor speller in the class is plastic to the influence of erroneous sights. What I show on the board is usually the correct letters; what I *say* is the foolish sound. Week after week I repeat, "A wrong letter ought to look just as queer to your eye as it sounds to your ear." Young people are strangely sensitive to any unusual pronunciation. The sound of "amowng" is gibberish to them, and the thought that they have written gibberish is painful. They understand that they have been queer.

It is custom that makes cowards of the stoutest of us in all ways, whether we give undeserved tips or are married in a frock coat that we shall never wear again. Custom dominates every thought of a pupil even more than of us grown-ups. If you can make him realize that his violations of spelling are socially "queer" breaches of custom, you will make him quail before his errors. Such cowardice is victory.

7. Can Some People Not Learn to Spell?

An occasional pupil seems unable to learn to spell. We all know of some adults who declare with a kind of pride that they are congenitally unable to spell. Hence arises the fair question, of importance to teachers, "Are there pupils who can never overcome demons?"

In my experience I have known a few boys, perhaps one in two hundred, whose difficulties were so extreme that

no ordinary class work would avail to teach them. Only special, individual, prolonged drill could tame their bronco eyes. The most unyielding case I ever dealt with (and I have never heard of a worse one) was a refined boy who read well and could write in artful, mature style; he had strong will-power and was an excellent wrestler. This gifted boy persisted for three years in his childish blunders. One day I decided to experiment with brutality, to see whether I could rouse his anger, could cause some mental upheaval that would give me new access to his mind. "You act like a nervous invalid," I told him. "You are 'yellow' in spelling. If you really cared, if you really tried, you could learn these common words. Why do you pretend that you are so weak? Can nothing make you ashamed?" He made no reply. The next day he came to my study to protest against my tongue-lashing, and could not keep back the tears, could hardly control his voice. If I had charged him with being a thief, he would hardly have been more offended. I was afraid I was going to cry myself when I saw the injury I had done. He improved somewhat that year, passed his college examination—and after he had been a freshman one month was put into the awkward squad because of his spelling.

Even this boy could have learned to spell if a stronger incentive had burned in his mind. If he had cared as much about "trys" as he did about losing a wrestling bout, he would have learned *tries* in a few weeks. That is the whole answer to the question at the head of this section. Any person of normal intellect can learn to spell the common demons if sufficient incentive is kindled in him. If the incentive is too weak, he cannot learn. The difficulty of spelling is of all degrees, from the extreme I have described down to a half-witted kitchen-boy I once taught, who could spell all sorts of words with inattentive ease. There

can be no doubt that some eyes register, without effort, accurate images of the letters seen, and that the memory stores the images perfectly; some eyes and memories are remarkably perverse. But the most confused minds make a large share of their errors within the limits of the few hundred demons and can overcome those particular errors if they feel real shame.

"Suppose that I could afford to give you a thousand dollars if you would not misspell *writing* again this year," you say to Maurice. He knows that he could earn the money. Boys know what "get mad" means in football—not being frantic against opponents, but "mad" in the sense of rousing all one's fighting power. So "get mad at yourself" is advice that enables many a boy to lay demons prostrate. If spelling ever becomes a fighting game for David, a contest in which he ought to "get mad," he will win.

8. What about All the Other Thousands?

A novice who has read this far in two chapters on spelling is mystified. "This writer," he says to himself, "seems to think that there are only three hundred spelling troubles in the world. He harps perpetually on them. When is he going to say something about all the vast field of the thousands of other words that have to be taught?"

And the novice will not believe me when I answer that there is nothing worth saying about the thousands. He cannot believe that for the most part they teach themselves or are seldom used, that we do not have to worry about them. Of course he cannot believe. I could never have taken anybody's word for such a truth. I could not accept the evidence of my own eyes during a ten-year period while they were constantly confronted with proof.

The fact is quite incredible, and I advise no teacher to accept it. You will not be convinced in one year, because you will see many misspellings that lie beyond the field of demons. Nor will you understand the truth after two years, because you will encounter a few demons not listed at the end of this chapter. Just as a history teacher learns that *parliament* is a demon, so you may find that some words like *dessert* or *ecstasy* are preternaturally hard. Our language must contain several thousand potential demons. But they occur so seldom or so locally that there is no general knowledge of them. They are not standard troubles. And the great majority of common words have no demonic properties. If there is not some specific cause of confusion, the right letters can easily be taught—more likely they will not have to be taught at all in high school.

Results in theme-writing are shown by the percentage of errors. Suppose that *separate* occurs, on the average, three times in every thousand words of spontaneous writing and that *icicle* occurs only once in 20,000 words; it follows that you will accomplish sixty times as much by teaching *separate* as by teaching *icicle*. There is no question that *grammar* is a thousand times more important than *zephyr*, and that ability to form singular possessives is ten thousand times more important. And the proportions are greater than the mere arithmetic shows, for this reason: whenever you harp on *zephyr*, you detract from the emphasis on demons, befogging the whole issue in spelling.

Your troubles center in a few hundred words; there are no vital problems outside of those. Ask any experienced teacher of college freshmen what he wishes the schools would do for him in spelling. "Teach just a few dozen words," he will answer. There are in print many such testimonies from thoughtful college instructors. Their

agony is caused by a mere handful of demons. Ask anyone who has conducted university courses for teachers of English; he will give the same answer: "These women seldom misspell any words except the high-school demons—especially *lose*, *its*, *recommend*, *develop*, and *repetition*." About fifteen per cent of American college graduates who teach high-school English have not mastered demons, but make few errors among the other thousands of words in their vocabularies.

No discussion of what to do with the thousands would afford you much help; it would do you damage by distracting your attention from the only field that signifies—from demons. I am aware of the fault that will be found with me for saying this. I know of the learned articles and books which present the thousand or two thousand or seven thousand words of adult vocabularies that ought to be taught in schools. Also I can grant that years hence, when educational conditions are different, it may prove desirable to work with the adult lists in school. But it is not my business in this manual to weigh the arguments of scholarship and deduce a bookish conclusion. You may read them in any library. My sole business is to testify what I know about securing results in average classes taught by average teachers. Results are secured by working intensively with demons and letting the thousands take care of themselves.

Society does not judge us by our ability with the thousands. Here is where we can join the Large Men and take the noble attitude that spelling is not a measure of culture. I have never pretended to know all the *ant* and *ent* words, or the *able* and *ible* words; I leave such knowledge to compositors. I do not know, until I trot once more to the dictionary, how to spell many words that I read but hardly ever write. When I tell boys that I am

a poor speller, I help them; for then I limit their responsibility. The matter is of the highest importance. If I made students liable for a knowledge of their whole vocabulary when they were not free to consult a dictionary, I should kill a sense of responsibility. But if I restrict my censure to those few dozen that have been carefully taught, I force boys to admit that the requirement is easy and that they are badly at fault if they fail.

The whole strategy of concentrating on a few common words is aimed at producing an attitude of mind. Mere ignorance has never seemed serious to me. But when ignorance has been removed, then a slipshod inattention to duty marks the boy whose mind is sloppy in all its duties. If I can sting him to a sense of responsibility, I have at least given him a chance to adjust himself to all responsibilities of life. Spelling-bees with "the hard words" are the sheerest gymnastic—all well enough in their way, but only a form of amusement. Mastery of demons is the stuff of reality.

How idle it is to toy with *sickle* and *scissors* and *scythe* was once proved in a laughable way by a veteran teacher, the late Mr. Pine of the Gilman School. He prepared a list of twenty words, known by teachers, but seldom written by them, which he used to propose to any acquaintance who thought himself a speller. He never encountered anyone who could spell them all; some intelligent teachers have missed seventeen of them. Here they are if you wish to see the parlor trick, half of them misspelled, so that you may test yourself with them:

sateen	picnicking	battalion	sacreligious
chaperone	billious	rarefy	tonsilitis
inuendo	dessicated	inoculate	comparitive
repellant	vilify	paraffine	embarrassment
inflammable	annoint	caterpillar	disippate

No sensible educated person holds himself liable for words of this character; his reputation is not dependent on such knowledge. For example, in one school the principal, a good speller, missed seven of the twenty, and a tenth-grade boy, a poor speller, missed seven. The list is not a criterion of education. It is opposite in nature to a list composed of *too*, *grammar*, etc.

I hope that some of the misspellings in the list may confuse you for life, because then you will understand how cruel it is to show any wrong form to pupils. I learned my lesson from the list. When I came to *caterpill()r*, I hesitated; there was a flicker of *a* and *e*, a memory that the modern form is a corruption and that the right form is now the wrong form; I was confused; I misspelled the word.

9. Are Rules of Any Use?

With one kind of skepticism about rules I am in accord. I have never been able to detect that any formal generalizing of a principle accomplishes anything—for example, a perfect memorizing of the rule for forming possessive plurals does not produce any apostrophes in themes. So it is true that rules are useless. It is also true that rules are very useful. If a teacher shows how to drop the *e* and add *ing* to form *loving;* and then how to drop the *e* and add *ing* to form *coming*, and so on, verb after verb, the pupil is taught by means of the separate examples; the rule counts for nothing as a starting point and almost for nothing through the first steps of instruction. Then it begins to gather force; after twenty examples have been shown on the board, the rule has some teaching force for the twenty-first verb; it is the rule (perhaps shortened to a mere "drop the *e*") which finally avails much—but only by virtue of repetition, familiarity. A rule

cannot by itself teach, any more than a mason's level can lay bricks; but it can keep instruction straight; only skew structures can be built without it.

No rule about accent or monosyllables can ever associate *dropped* and *beginning* in the adolescent mind, since "accent" is so abstruse that it will be hardly more than a philological phantom. But the fact of *stopped* can easily be associated with the fact of *stopping*, *planned* with *planning*, *planning* with *sinning*, and so finally with *beginning; omitted* and *occurred* can finally be related to *stopped*. The skilful teacher will be keeping all these bits plumb by the rule that is in his mind, which is gradually realized by the pupil and which may some day take shape in a brief, colloquial statement about "single consonant, single vowel, accent." In similar ways we arrive at firm, usable, ready knowledge of changing *y* to *i* and of using an apostrophe where something is omitted. This most fruitful labor in spelling we have only begun to learn about; we must help each other by working out careful approaches and tactful solutions—never involved, never stating two opposites in one breath, never abstracted from the simplest facts.

10. Derived Forms

It is a curious memory to recall that I used to think of spelling as a subject to be taught out of a book which contains several thousand words graded from easy to hard. Even the list of demons is not the greatest necessity, for it is more important to teach the derived forms of verbs and nouns. Why derivatives have received so little stress is one of the marvels of English. They are much more common causes of error than single words and deserve much greater emphasis. Many teachers are

realizing this fact, as is shown in recently published lists of minimum requirements. Such a form as "stoped" is not commensurable with "peticular"; for it proves a wide and deep ignorance of a host of frequent forms. John A. Lester* estimates that nine per cent of all the misspellings of candidates for college entrance are failures in possessives.

Errors in derived forms are more pervasive and more egregious than errors with single words, as a few illustrations will show. "Scrubed" shows that the writer of it will go "sluming" and "diping" and that he will be forever "triping" and "sliping" in a most ghastly way. "Ladys" may not be worse than "discribe," but it means a woeful ignorance that is going to be displayed in every composition; it signifies more illiteracy, a more hopeless mental state. A "ladie's" hat certifies that the writer is grossly uneducated, while "persuit" proves no more than that he is careless. It is such always-used principles that we must drive at. "Dissapear" may be good evidence that the writer will misspell several similar words that occur once in a while; "comeing" is proof that he will misspell a hundred that occur constantly. It is these derived forms that prove the lack of education and that multiply errors. When you establish such a type-form. you wipe out a whole regiment of the enemy.

I will now indicate the sort of teaching that must be done in an average class to secure mastery of the five principal ways of changing letters in making derived forms. The methods of securing results economically in these elementary matters would seem unworthy to print if I did not recall a little episode in my first year's work. I had taught a class how to form possessives. Of course I had taught

*See his interesting and useful *A Spelling Review: The 750 Words Most Frequently Misspelled,* privately printed by the author and sent postpaid for twenty cents. Address the Hill School, Pottstown, Pa.

them. We had spent a whole period with this one subject, rehearsing the rule and looking at examples which I put on the board. The subject was thoroughly covered. Two weeks later the headmaster took the class for a few days while I observed his work. To my astonishment he went over the whole subject of possessives again, proving by the boys' blunders in their answers to his questions that they knew nothing about the subject. At the end of the year they didn't know much. Now compare this case with an affair at the end of my twentieth year of teaching: a competent senior, thoroughly trained in mechanics for four years, declared that he did not feel sure about how to form possessives—and I was *not* astonished. During the first year I was like a child trying to train a fire department, utterly ignorant of the forces which I hoped to direct. A few paragraphs of warning would have changed my whole conception of what I was about, of what I must overcome, of how difficult it is to secure results, of how precious the results are. What I most needed was the truth, which I never dreamed of, that is put into the next paragraph.

Teaching how to form possessives is a delicate technique, requiring special knowledge. And even when you have succeeded, you have not so much as begun real teaching. Teaching begins when you oblige a pupil to use apostrophes in his own writing. It does not end until you have disciplined him into a habit—a fixed, invariable HABIT—of always using an apostrophe for every possessive noun in his writing.

That is not simply my personal creed. It is the demand of our democracy today, as voiced by good high schools everywhere. It grows more insistent every year. The younger generation of teachers must be in accord with it if they hope to succeed.

11. The Forming of Possessives

There are two entirely different processes in making possessives. If you smash these together in one academic rule, you will reduce all your teaching to a hopeless pulp. Separate them. Present them at different times. Refer to them as distinct processes.

First there is the matter of singular possessives. The rule is simple, invariable: add an apostrophe and *s* to the singular. (The only exceptions I know are *Jesus* and a sibilant before *sake*, as in *goodness' sake*.) You do not like the rule; you shrink from *Alcibiades's* or even from *Burns's*. You use only the apostrophe in such possessives, or perhaps you fancy *'s* for monosyllables and only the apostrophe for words of more than one syllable Very few teachers can tolerate the brutal simplicity of "always add *'s* to every singular." Indulge your own dainty taste as much as you like in your own correspondence. But if you wish to economize your strength in teaching, to make life tolerable for pupils, and to train them in the usage that now dominates the typographical world, then it is the part of wisdom to teach the one plain fact of modern custom: always use *'s*.

Understand me. I am not talking about good taste or about our preferences as individuals. We are concerned with results in teaching poor spellers. Keep your eyes on them, put aside squeamishness, forget taste; think only of the harm you do if you mention to poor spellers any other way of forming a singular possessive. You will produce "Burn's" and "ladie's." Pupils despise *Dickens's* worse than you do, and all of them who have the wit will soon learn that they are allowed to use *Dickens'* if they prefer it. You do not forbid *Dickens'*. You are helping

poor spellers to avoid "Jone's" if you give them, as an aid in their weakness, the invariable simple rule, "Always add an apostrophe and *s* to the singular."

After you have taught the rule, and after you have taught plural possessives, you will be made despondent by the sight of "ladies's." So prepare against this as best you may by emphasizing *singular*.

The greatest need of the rule is for names ending in *s*, like *Holmes* and *Hughes* and *Williams*. I once prophesied to a class of boys, after many fierce repetitions of the rule, that within a week one of them would again stab a name by putting an apostrophe within it; and I asked if they would agree in advance that any boy who made such an error in future deserved the extreme penalty. They agreed. Three of them accepted zeros like good sports, gratefully. At least five per cent of our high-school teachers write equivalents of "Dicken's." When you try to train a class to keep apostrophes outside of names, you are attempting the almost impossible.

The rule next in order of importance is for nouns ending in *y* preceded by a consonant. The habit of changing *y* to *i* for a plural is a strong influence and will every so often produce "ladie's." A good prophylactic is this: "Don't change anything. Write the word. Then to the word—whatever it is—add an apostrophe and *s*. Be brave. Stay with the rule. Just add an apostrophe and *s*."

When a class is habituated to the singular possessive of nouns, it will of course be prone to use an apostrophe for the personal pronouns *its*, *yours*, etc. Some pupils will even write "who's." The freakish possessives of personals are a misfortune, especially since the indefinites, like *one* and *another*, form their possessives as nouns do. We must be as sympathetic as possible with any per-

plexity that students feel. Don't teach the personal possessives as part of a whole complicated rule; don't treat it as an exception to the rule; don't associate it with any rule for possessives. Teach the detached fact that there must not be an apostrophe in personal pronouns. Youth is not logical. It does not desire, as you do, to build a system which will be a complete and scholarly epitome. It can remain cheerful if you teach unrelated and contradictory fragments.

The plural possessive is so much less common than the singular as to be almost rare in themes. Don't elevate it to a false prominence and don't be in a hurry to teach it. When you do approach it, say that there are four steps and that only people of the highest intelligence can succeed in making a plural possessive unless they are fully conscious of each step. First get the plural. Language fails to convey the truth about the marvel of the unwillingness of young Americans to go slowly, to take one step at a time, and to be cautious enough to form the plural. Second: Stop, look, and listen. Only the rare boy or girl is willing to take this second step. The others are in too much of a hurry. Third: If, as is usually true, we see by our stopping and looking that the plural ends in *s*, we are to put an apostrophe after the *s*. Only that. Nothing more. Then we are all done. Fourth: If, as occasionally happens, the plural does not end in *s*, we proceed just as if we had a singular; we add an apostrophe and *s*.

It is quite a mental feat to write "men's and boys' clothing." Sign-painters fail about two times out of three, thus furnishing teachers with a bit of real life for illustration. What is the plural of *mouse?* The rule yields *mice's*, and I suppose that is proper. But I don't know, for I have never seen it in print. That is another illustration from real life.

12. Changing *y* to *i*

By all odds the most common irregular plural is the one formed from a noun which ends in a *y* that is preceded by a consonant: *ally, allies.* If *y* is preceded by a vowel, no change is made: *alley, alleys.* The rule for this distinction, simple as it seems to us, is a big formality to a ninth-grade student. Remember that he probably does not know what the vowels are, and that to teach him why *u* is sometimes called a consonant (as in *obsequies*) and sometimes a vowel (as in *guys*) is a big undertaking. Nor is the rule without exceptions; *Henrys* and *Marys* are usually regarded as the proper plurals, and there are a few exceptions like *drys* and *stand-bys.*

For the third person singular of verbs the same rules hold: *buoys, cries, buys.* The most demonic failures to follow the rule are in the three verbs *cries, tries, replies.* If you want a story for the class, tell them that in the *Century Dictionary*, under *mewler*, is "One who crys or mewls"—the most extraordinary typographical error that I have ever discovered. I never put "crys" on the board or name the *y*, but say that "the same old school error crept in past the eyes of a whole corps of proof-readers."

For the past tense of verbs the same rules hold: *cried, obeyed.* Past tenses are much less demonic than the *ies* forms. The great exception, highly important and better taught as a quite detached fact, is three *ay* verbs that form past tenses in *aid: laid, paid, said.* All other *ay* verbs are regular, like *stayed, delayed. Delay* is not the same sort of compound as *inlay*, and *staid* is practically obsolete as a past tense.

When suffixes are added to adjectives and adverbs ending in *y*, the same rules hold: *happier, bonniest, grayer, luckily, bagginess. Luckily* is almost a demon: *business* is an arch-

fiend. It cannot be taught by any amount of parading *busy, busi, busi+ness,* though the parade is a necessary preliminary to teaching.

Thus it appears that "change *y* to *i*" is a very common operation. The emphasis must be thrown that way; the change is to be regarded as the rule. The cases of not changing after a vowel are fewer, less likely to give trouble, and should be soft-pedaled when they arise.

The opposite of the "*y* to *i*" rule applies to some common verbs that end in *ie—die, lie, tie, vie.* The *ie* must be changed to *y* before *ing.* Some careful newspapers use *tieing* in the baseball columns, but I cannot find any warrant for such a form.

13. Contractions and Abbreviations

The clue that students need for contractions is this: "Never add any letter; never make any change; simply put an apostrophe where a letter has been omitted." A good way of presenting the forms graphically is to use a plus sign and an equals sign:

does + not = doesn't
have + not = haven't

Students never use wrong letters in *don't,* but many of them who can spell *does* will write "dosen't." In this error, and in "isen't" and "wasen't," there is probably an attraction by forms like *aren't* and *haven't.* Otherwise contractions furnish few misspellings. The labor of a teacher is most directed toward securing the apostrophe. *Don't, doesn't,* and *can't* are as important as all the others put together.

There are only three irregularities in forming contractions, and these are slight: (1) omitting an *n* in *can't;*

(2) not using an apostrophe for the *ll* in *shan't* (though two apostrophes were used formerly and are correct now); (3) using *won't*, formed from the old verb *woll*, for *will not*.

A contraction is a shortened form, made by taking out letters from the middle of a combination; no period is used at the end; an apostrophe is always used. An abbreviation, on the contrary, is formed by removing letters from the middle or end of a single word; no apostrophe is used; a period is always used. There is no form in which both an apostrophe and a period are proper.

14. Dropping Final *E*

"Students love their little *e*'s" is a help in persuading boys and girls to abandon "hopeing," "argueing," and the like. The universality of this affection for *e* is proved by the fact that I have never seen an *e* omitted from such words as *horseshoeing* or *dyeing* when they appear in signs; all painters love *e*, and in this case they happen to be right. (Yet, with that strange cockneyism which occurs in several parts of the field of spelling, an *e* is often omitted from *peaceable*, *vengeance*, etc.) The *e* should be retained in the *oe* verbs (*toeing*, *canoeing*, etc.) and in a few cases to avoid ambiguity—as in *singeing*, to distinguish it from *singing*. Otherwise *e* should always be dropped before *ing*.

The *e* should be dropped before any suffix beginning with a vowel, as in *tamable*, *lovable*, except: (*a*) to preserve a soft sound of *c* or *g* (*peaceable*, *manageable*); (*b*) in a few oddities like *mileage*, *acreage*, and the compound word *lineup*.

The *e* should be kept before a suffix beginning with a consonant (as in *immediately*, *sincerely*) except in *ninth*, *truly*, *duly*, *awful*, and the *ment* words, like *argument*, *judgment*.

To teach these rules and exceptions is very dubious business; I believe it is wrong practice. The advice most needed is "drop the *e*," and the suffix to which the advice most often applies is *ing*. If you bear on this one matter, you will be doing three-fourths of the work that is needed. "Drop the *e* before *ing*," "drop the *e* before *able* and *ment*," are commands constantly needed. As a distinct matter, an unrelated fact taught at a different time, cultivate the *e* in such words as *immediately*, *surely*, *arrangement*, *definitely*.

15. Doubling a Final Consonant

If we made a complete list of all verbs that end in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, we should find that the majority do not double the final consonant before *ed* and *ing*. There should be no doubling unless the accent is on the last syllable. The principal effort in teaching is to secure the double consonant for one-syllable verbs, especially *stopped*. I should guess that this one verb accounts for twenty per cent of all failure to double a final consonant in one-syllable verbs.

The one-syllable verbs are the starting-point for teaching the rule. Remember that "accent" is a mere name, a mystery, to most pupils, who cannot tell whether *prefer* is accented on the last or the first syllable. They are very sensitive to the sound of *pre'fer;* it is an absurdity to them. But special exercise will be needed to connect this recognition of a sound with the abstraction of "where the accent is." When I try to conform to the way boys' minds work, I have to talk like this: "Suppose I had a little verb *fer;* how would the past tense be spelled? If I put in front of this verb a syllable that is lightly pronounced, so that my voice doesn't pay much attention to it, but slides along and hits hard on *fer*, then I have the same effect as in

ferred—preferred." I slur the first syllable unnaturally and stress the last syllable unnaturally. In the same way I talk about *bel, rebel; trol, control; gin, beginning.*

Another phase of the teaching is to say that in two-syllable verbs the consonant is to be doubled only "when all three things are true: single consonant, single vowel, accent on the last syllable." Illustrations for exercise are *defend, succeed, open, occur.* In each of the first three cases the rule does not apply, but it does apply for *occur. Occur* and *begin* are the most common two-syllable verbs that need a double consonant.

A third phase is to keep dinning at the absurd sounds represented by a failure to double the consonant. "Bill Meeker tells me that he 'stoped' to look. Aleck has once more used the fine old Manchurian verb 'beggin,' meaning to wear a ring in the nose, the participle of which is 'beggining.' " Boys wince at ridicule like that, for they cannot deny that they have used verbs which are current only in Wonderland. Of course the poor fellows have not really done anything of the sort; they are in the power of demons that have no connection with sounds. But they are open to phonetic jibing.

In this paragraph I will offer some bits of information that are hard to secure and that sometimes come in handy. For some mysterious reason American pupils nearly all prefer *travelled* and *traveller*, though they see the double *l* in print much less often than the single *l*. In England the double *l* is the prevailing usage; why Americans should like it—especially those cockneys who write "occured"—is past understanding. *Chagrined* is the only exception to the rule that I know. *Combated* is spelled with one *t* because dictionary authority is strongly in favor of the pronunciation *com'bat;* but *combatted* is frequently used by good writers who wish to indicate the prevailing accent,

combat'. It may be better to double the *p* of *kidnap*, because of the strong secondary accent on *nap;* but American usage is against doubling for such words as *diagram* and *focus*. The rule for doubling a final consonant in verbs applies to the suffixes *er* and *ence: controller, occurrence.* But usage is not settled for some suffixes: *regretable* is proper and *clubable* seems to be preferred. In forming plurals the rule seems not to hold: *gases* is the only warranted form; *quizes* and *fezes* are preferred, and almost universal custom has recently turned to *buses.* Dictionary authority, strangely enough, favors *busses;* but the *Century* has always advised its correspondents to use a single *s*, and editors in the offices of the two other American dictionaries tell me that the single *s* will probably be favored in their next revisions.

16. The Demons

Sections 10-15 have dealt with the most common alterations in making derived forms; this section deals with the simple words that are most commonly misspelled—the demons. On page 56, Section 9, is an explanation of demons: that they are few in number and that there is not as yet any sure knowledge of their order of importance. Hence the estimates of what to include in a list of demons have varied from twenty to four hundred. (See page 54, Section 8.) The best guide I know for the novice to use as a foundation is the list given in *The University of Iowa Extension Bulletin, Number 68.* This presents the following seventy-five words as the ones that need most stress, and stars eighteen of them as "excessively difficult." I have added stars to *grammar, business,* and *describe,* which I am sure deserve to be elevated to the rank of superdemons.

I. PREVIOUS TO THE EIGHTH GRADE

across	having	running	their
all right*	hear	sense	threw
among	hoping	sentence	too*
before	its*	separate*	tried
coming	know	stopped*	truly
divide	lose*	straight	until
forty	perhaps	sure	which
grammar*			

II. NOT LATER THAN THE EIGHTH GRADE

almost	either	pleasant	toward
asks	February	quiet	useful
beginning*	finally*	receive*	Wednesday
believe*	loving	shining*	writing*
business*	minute	surprised*	written
doctor	paid	taking	

III. NOT LATER THAN THE NINTH GRADE

already	immediately	piece	together
cries	led	principal*	usually
definite*	lying*	probably	whether
describe*	meant	really	whose
disappointed*	occasionally	replies	women
generally	occurred*	sincerely	

I will remark, for your future comfort, that no school in the United States has yet been reported which can completely master those groups of words as early as specified in the Iowa *Bulletin*.

Next I offer the lists which have been built up gradually at the Taft School since 1903. These include the super-demons and the fifty-four demons of the Iowa list, two

hundred other words that have considerable claim to demonism, and examples of derived forms that are most commonly misspelled. A few words are included more as illustrations than as demonic in themselves—like *emphatically* and *delicious*. "Second-grade words" is used as a title for the first list because all but six are in the Jones second-grade list. "Fifth-grade" means only "not quite so childish." All the words in the lists which follow are common pests in all the high-school years.

I. SECOND-GRADE WORDS

It is *too* big
Their house
I *know* the lesson
He *knew* it
He *threw* the ball
The ball was *thrown*
He *meant* to do right
He *shows* good *sense*
He *asks* questions
He *turns* the crank
He *speaks* in a *weak* voice
Tired after working
We got *off* the road
He ought to *have* told us
We *told* him
Stay *there*
A *new* rule
Go *through* the woods
They are *almost* here
It is *already* five o'clock
He *always* comes
Although I don't want to
Wait *until* six
Speeches every *week*

rough
enough
which
straight
across
among
every
before
once
crowd
some
piece
believe
friend
since
stretch
a *rough road*
toward the house
It is *quite* cold
The guide *led* us
No one *except* him
I am *sure* it is *sugar*
Did you *lose* the money?

II. FIFTH-GRADE WORDS

1

perhaps	probably	sentence	surprise

2. *E* dropped before *ing*

writing	coming	shining	having

Canoeing and *shoeing* are peculiar forms

3

stop	stopped	stopping
drag	dragged	dragging
hop	hopped	hopping
slam	slammed	slamming
sin	sinned	sinning
strip	stripped	stripping
plan	planned	planning
begin	.....	beginning
occur	occurred	occurring
compel	compelled	compelling
refer	referred	referring
prefer	preferred	preferring
omit	omitted	omitting
control	controlled	controlling
roll	rolled	rolling
write	written	writing
dine	dined	dining-room
suffer	suffered	suffering
offer	offered	offering
travel	traveled	traveling
develop	developed	developing
open	opened	opening

4

try	trying	tries	tried
cry	crying	cries	cried
reply	replying	replies	replied
tie	tying	ties	tied
lie	lying	lies	*lay*

It *lay* there yesterday
It *has lain* there many days

study	studying	studies	studied
hurry	hurrying	hurries	hurried

5. Verbs in *ay*—three peculiar forms

lay	laid	lays
pay	paid	pays
say	said	says

6. All other *ay* verbs are regular

stay	stayed	stays
play	played	plays
delay	delayed	delays

7. Consonant before *y*

lady	ladies
story	stories
family	families

8. Vowel before *y*

alley	alleys	boy	boys
monkey	monkeys	play	plays
journey	journeys		

9

easy	easier	easily
happy	happier	happiness
heavy	heavier	heavily
lucky	luckier	luckily
busy	business	busily

10. Adjectives like these end in *ful*

awful painful useful fearful hopeful successful

11. Adjectives like these end in *ous*

famous	jealous	delicious
generous	furious	religious
precious	various	curious
conscious	ingenious	suspicious
victorious	cautious	mysterious

Bogus, *minus*, and *citrus* are peculiar forms

12

dis + agree = disagree	re + collect = recollect
dis + appear = disappear	accommodate
dis + appoint = disappoint	committee
dis + satisfied = dissatisfied	mean + ness = meanness
mis + spell = misspell	drunken + ness = drunkenness
re + commend = recommend	sullen + ness = sullenness

13. No hyphens

together	wherever	apiece
altogether	nevertheless	inside
without	nowhere	outside
whatever		

14

generally
really
naturally
finally
usually
accidentally
especially
practically
artistically

frantically
enthusiastically
grammatically
sarcastically
emphatically
formally = in a formal way
formerly = in former times

Publicly is a peculiar form

15. Two sep *a* rate words

all right
at last

in spite
in fact

16. Trouble with *o*

forty
prisoner
porch
among

lose
move
prove

17. Trouble with *u*

minute
pursuit

accustomed
guard

18. Trouble with *ou*

four
fourth
fourteen

though
thorough
trouble

of course not
the ship's course
double

19. Trouble with *a*

separate	grammar	any	a *stationary* engine
separation	pleasant	many	*coarse* cloth
preparation	descendant	again	rainy *weather*
secretary	woman	furnace	it doesn't *affect* me

20. Trouble with *e*

describe	despair	*whether* to go or not
description	sentence	a good *effect*
biggest	pretty	a *quiet* Sunday
greatest	repetition	women
enemy	benefit	
destroy	buying *stationery*	

21. Trouble with *i*

definite	view	delicate
divide	similar	medicine
divine	intelligent	disturb
privilege	originally	

22. Possessives

a lady's hat	the ladies' hats	the men's hats
a fox's tail	the foxes' tails	the children's toys
Mr. Jones's house	the Joneses' property	

its yours hers theirs whose

one *another's* burdens
each *other's* arms

any*one's* cap
a *dollar's* worth

23. An apostrophe shows that letters have been left out

do + not = don't	does + not = doesn't
have + not = haven't	we + will = we'll
did + not = didn't	they + are = they're
are + not = aren't	it + is = it's
was + not = wasn't	you + have = you've
should + not = shouldn't	where + is = where's

24. Three irregular forms

can + not = can't shall + not = shan't will + not = won't

25

a participle	a *practical* man
an article	the *principal* thing
a principle	

26. Pronounce *brilliant ruffian; a* comes before *i* in the following:

certain captain villain

27

decision, occasion } one s = z omission, permission } two s's = sh

Possessive is a peculiar form

28. Queerly pronounced

Wednesday	knowledge	one woman	solemn
beautiful	marriage	answer	necessary

29. Ought not to be queerly pronounced

government	obstinate	quarter
arctic	particularly	corner
February	Saturday	

30. No extra letters

athletics	translate	apologies
possibly	translation	apologize
library		

31. Single letters

around	imitate	image
arouse	amount	imagine

32. *E* before a suffix that begins with a consonant

nineteen	surely	entirely
ninety	sincerely	extremely
safety	affectionately	definitely
arrangement	immediately	immensely

33. Drop *e* before a suffix that begins with a vowel

lovable	immovable	desirable

34. Also drop *e* in *ninth, truly, argument*

35. Pronounce *cable, gable, elegance.* Notice the *e's* in the following:

noticeable	unmanageable	vengeance	changeable	peaceable

36. *E* is kept in order to preserve the sound of *c* and *g*. *Judgment* is a peculiar form.

37. Double letters

supplies approach address arrive

38. Some of the more common nouns in *el*

angel nickel channel tunnel shovel level

39. Put the *w* in *crowd*

40

critic criticize criticism opinion fascinate

41

prophet a prophecy two prophecies to prophesy he prophesies

42. Five wonderful words

goddess shepherd nymph comedy tragedy

The teaching of any demon demands that a peculiar, extravagant emphasis shall be put on the trouble-spot. A sister in a parochial school says, "I keep 'sep A rate' on the board, with a red *a* one foot high, till the little ones grow ashamed to misspell it." A man in an academy says, "Your father is in the second syllable; put your *pa* in." Putting your *par* and your *mar* in *se par ate* and *gram mar* might work wonders in some school. The most

demonic name in the language is *Macaulay*. I worked with it in vain until I hit upon this device to show the three *a*'s:

Ma cau lay
1 2 3

It is the *ged* that must be made to stand out if a class is to learn *tragedy;* if you pronounce the *g* with a hard sound and pair *ged* with the *med* of *comedy*, you may succeed. If "benifit" is to be killed, we must appeal to *bene, bene, bene*—plus *fio* or *valent* or *diction* or what not. The only path I can see to *definite* is by way of *finite,* pronounced with special stress on *nite.* "What does 'sappear' mean? Oh, so the verb is 'appear'? Well, well!" Every student knows *final;* also he knows that he uses *ly* to form an adverb; ask him to add one *l* to one *l* and see what the sum is. Do anything that pops into your head; and when you find something that works in your class, you may know that it will work in future classes.

17. The *ie* and *ei* Words

No one should attempt to teach the *ie* and *ei* words without counting the cost. In many backward classes the time should be conserved for more rudimentary matters. In other classes the teaching may have to be limited to the one most important fact as applied to a handful of the most common words: use *ie* for a long *e* sound, except (1) after *c*, (2) in *seize, weird, either, neither.*

But any partial teaching will include some untruth. If I could not teach the whole truth, I should let the subject entirely alone beyond the limit just proposed. It is an intricate subject, though not nearly so formidable when

fully understood as it seems at first sight. The following key is one that I made in 1897; it was printed in the New York *Times*, has been constantly checked up ever since, and may be trusted.

Start thus: "Always expect the order of letters to be *ie* unless you know definitely to the contrary." Learn the four cases in which it is *ei:* (1) when the sound is that of long *a* or long *i;* (2) when the sound is short *i* or short *e* (except *mischief, kerchief, friend,* and *sieve);* (3) after *c* (except *financier);* (4) in six freaks: *seize, weird, leisure, either, neither, inveigle.* For practical purposes the two great points to emphasize are: (I) always write *ie* for the long *e* sound—*piece, believe, fierce, siege,* etc.—except *seize, weird,* and *neither;* (II) always *ei* after *c.*

The whole matter can be remembered by the following jangles, the plan of which is to suggest the rules in the first lines and the exceptions in the next two:

1. *I* before *e* when sound is long *e.*
   Except { Seize, inveigle, either,
   Except { Weird, leisure, neither.
2. *Ei* after *c* or when sound is not *ē.*
   Except { Financier, fiery, and mischief,
   Except { Friend, sieve, view, and handkerchief.

This looks complicated to you; much more will it to your pupils. But so far as I know, it is the only rule given under heaven among men. If you approach it one step at a time, getting yourself and the class gradually familiar with it, it will finally seem almost as simple as "Thirty days hath September." Should you not wish to use it, you can at least do valuable work (and the important part) by emphasizing the first lines of the jangles.

I will add a paragraph about some exceptions; not because it is very useful and certainly not because your

classes will ever need it, but so as to give assurance against embarrassment if a pupil should suddenly spring one of the forms. There are no exceptions to long *a;* use for illustration *sleigh, freight, rein, vein, feint, their, heir.* The only real exception to long *i* is *fiery,* for such forms as *lie, vie, tries* do not give trouble on this score, are not entered for discussion; use for illustration *height, sleight, stein, meistersinger, seismograph, kaleidoscope, eiderdown, heigh-ho.* Words in short *i* are *foreign, sovereign, surfeit, counterfeit;* the only exceptions I know are *mischief, kerchief,* and *sieve.* "Short *e*" is put in above simply for completeness; the only one I have noted is *heifer* (though often *leisure*); the only exception is *friend.* One speller makes a point of *glacier* as an exception to the *c* rule, another is worried about *ancient,* and we might add *species;* but these, on account of their *sh* sound, give no trouble, do not belong in this class. There are a number of exceptions to long *e,* but none that are likely to occur in themes: *plebeian* is a possibility; *seignorage* is an impossibility; Scotch forms like *weir* and *teind* should not distract us; nor archaisms like *teil. Sheik* is a common exception in recent slang, though in its legitimate meaning it may properly be pronounced with a long *a;* I have not entered it in the rule because its slang sense may soon die. *Obeisance* has a common pronunciation in long *a. Lieu* is like *view.*

18. Some Odds and Ends

(*a*) *Nouns ending in "o."* Nouns that end in *o* preceded by a vowel form their plurals by the addition of *s: folio, folios.* But eight common nouns that end in *o* preceded by a consonant form their plurals by adding *es: echo, hero, negro, no, potato, tomato, tornado, torpedo;* also the game of *dominoes* and the Scotch *jo.* Most others must be

os, and all others may be. The rule is usually given the other way round, but there is dictionary warrant for *os* in every case except as stated above. In all our dictionaries *os* is understood when no plural is indicated. The Princeton Press prefers *os* even for such words as *hero* and *echo;* and that is a sensible ruling. The editor of *Puck* used the *os* exclusively for many years without exciting criticism.

(*b*) *Verbs in "eed" and "ede."* There are only three *eed* verbs: *exceed, proceed,* and *succeed.* Others are regular, like *precede* and the noun *procedure.*

(*c*) *Adjectives in "ful."* There are no adjectives in *full* except newly-coined, hyphenated words. Otherwise such adjectives are like *useful.*

(*d*) *Inserting "k."* A few verbs like *mimic* and *picnic* require a *k* before *ing* to preserve the hard sound of *c: mimicking.*

(*e*) *The "el" and "le" nouns.* There is no generalization for the *el* and *le* nouns. The best I can do is to make sure of a few common ones in *el,* heading the list with *angel.*

(*f*) *"Affect" and "effect."* Never discuss *affect* and *effect* together; teach that *affect* is a verb; some weeks later teach that *effect* is a noun; in my school I have ceased to say anything about the verb *effect,* for it can seldom be managed by any but bookish boys.

(*g*) *The longing for "e" before "s" in verbs.* Many cultured adults long to put an *e* into such verb forms as *smooths* and *mouths.* Pupils extend this longing to such forms as "turnes" and "showes." The form "askes" is a standard demon which flourishes with so much vigor that you will learn to stand in awe of it.

(*h*) *"Alright."* It is often argued that "alright" is going to establish itself, and I wish it would. But the chances are all against the solid form. Teachers are embattled

to oppose it; no dictionary tolerates it; logic is against it, since such words as *already* grew up to indicate a meaning different from *all ready*. Though I see it occasionally in print, I think it shows no power to become respectable.

19. Compound Words

All students (and most teachers?) have a fondness for making words too open. What ought to be solid (e.g., *baseball*) is split up with a hyphen; what ought to be hyphenated (e.g., *half-witted*) is split into two words. Though usage in compound words is not settled and should not have much attention in school, the advice to "close up the words" is always sound. Words like *upstairs* and *textbook* should be solid; compound adjectives (like *a worth-while book*) should be hyphenated. The following words must never be allowed with hyphens: *together*, *altogether*, *without*, *nevertheless*, *semicolon*.

20. Capitalization

It is curious to see how Capitalization (with a big C) is often elevated to the dignity of a separate subject, on a par with spelling and punctuation. But in truth it is only a very small compartment of spelling. Rules for capitals are by no means settled and have never been allowed to waste time in my school. Of course the first word of a sentence and of a line of poetry must be capitalized, but these matters are childishly easy. Nor have I ever found that the capitals of *South* and *North* or the small letters of *spring* and *autumn* are difficult matters. Though I require capitals in titles of books and themes, I know of so much good usage in favor of small letters beyond the first word that I dare not over-emphasize my prejudice. I have made

an effort against "Inn"; the capital is probably due to such familiar names as *Arrowhead Inn* and is a very persistent demon. The only big issue in the field of capitals is in the names of languages, especially *English, Latin,* and *French.* I have received themes from university graduates, teachers of English, who wrote the name of their subject with a small *e.*

21. Dictation and Correcting

Dictating a list of words hardly proves anything about the mastery of a spelling lesson. Long ago I decided to use sentences. If you dictate words in sentences—especially if you put only two or three words of the lesson into each sentence and if you coax pupils' attention away from spelling by queer subject-matter—you produce somewhat the effect of original composition, and thus secure a real test. If you dictate "His purple turban was too much for my nerves," you will find the class worrying about *turban* (which you may tell them how to spell) and wondering about such strange head-gear; some of them will forget all about *too.* Use whimsical or lively or colloquial sentences. Get up little paragraphs that tell an anecdote. Read these entirely through first, then dictate slowly in small sections. Dictation of this sort can be made to review points of idiom and punctuation.

Mark the misspelled words and return the paper. The errors must be corrected. Now, here is a small point that counts for much: Don't allow *each word* to be written out ten times. That seems not to accomplish anything. I know of a teacher's requiring a boy to write out *since* five hundred times in the afternoon—and finding that in the evening the boy had not learned how to spell *since.* Require *a list* of the misspelled words; require *this list* to be

written ten times. Better still, require the complete sentence to be rewritten, and several times, with the test words underlined.

22. Mastery in Spelling

Even when a student has twice written a word correctly in spelling exercises, he may not know it. There is no proof of knowledge until he has been able to write the word correctly for a year—or two or three years—in his own composition. The goal of spelling is *habitual mastery* when the mind is occupied with expressing thoughts. There is nowadays a wave, almost an avalanche, of insistence that teachers shall work for habitual mastery of common words.

Such teaching elevates spelling to a height far above the level of mere knowledge. It establishes an attitude of mind. It shows aimless children the way to self-control and responsibility. It teaches discouraged children what victory is. It stimulates the sense of what wrong is and of satisfaction in right work. "But," exclaims some uplifter, "doesn't all this attention to horrid details distract from the higher and larger matters?" So far as I can gather from the testimony of literary-minded teachers, the answer is a pitying smile for the depth of ignorance that asks such a question.

You know the story of the boy whose hands were always dirty? His mother did not reform him by dwelling upon cleanliness and godliness. She bought him a ring. He was so proud of this that he realized how smudgy his hands were. He began to use soap. Somehow or other a little correct spelling, in which every pupil feels pride when once he has learned it, acts like a ring. It is an incentive to clean themes.

CHAPTER V

WHY STUDY GRAMMAR?

"Grammar is to most of us an elusive mystery, maddening as a mosquito." So wrote Professor Robert Palfrey Utter for *Harper's Magazine* of February, 1920, in an article entitled "The Case Against Grammar." He was formerly of Harvard and Amherst, now is chairman of the English department at the University of California; he sets forth a feeling and a reason that are prevalent among those who advise teachers of English. His essay is charming and wholesome, temperate too, not totally condemning, but describing the general ignorance and folly that underlie the making of grammar rules. He says a sensible student will decide that these rules, "his teacher's gods," are only "a set of little grinning clay images on a shelf in a schoolroom."

The description is none too strong. Grammatical rules of correct idiom are idols, and all who worship them are sunk in superstition. For my own part, I cannot endure the company of anyone who pays homage to rules for correctness of speech. Grammar would convict Lowell of barbarism for asking which of two songs is the *best* in the nice ear of nature. Grammar tells us that "it's me" is very, very naughty; yet Barrett Wendell (who was long the dean of American theme-readers) was unwilling to say "it is I," for fear of sounding priggish and superstitious. Grammar enjoins upon its devotees the use of "it doesn't," yet there are learned and fastidious men who fear to bow the knee and who deliberately choose "it don't." Why

shouldn't a child ask "can I go?" If a well-trained child does not secure permission, he can fairly feel unable to go. Why should a child be taught that a verb must agree with its subject, and then be taught to say "there are a number of"? I am not arguing for license in these idioms. As a matter of fact I am myself afraid of "it don't." But the grammar rule does not make me fear. I hesitate before a strong social taboo. "Correctness" is, as Mr. Utter says, purely a matter of etiquette. I think he is very patient with the heathen who worship rules as if they were realities.

I once suggested to a large class of high-school teachers, in a list of topics for essays, "Why Study Grammar?" All who chose this topic favored grammar, and nearly all of them defended it on the ground that it insured "correctness" in the use of the language. Most advocates of grammar take that ground. Most textbooks take it. For example, the last composition text I have received has an appendix that is mostly devoted to grammar. The writer presents as examples of the necessity of grammar: an ambiguous personal pronoun, a hanging gerund, a plural verb with *either . . . or*, a *whom* that is a subject, a relative clause ambiguously placed, a phrase ambiguously placed, a preposition wrongly applied to each of two nouns, an *as . . . than* combination, an awkwardly placed *not*, a doubtful compound sentence. Some of these constructions are not grammatical blunders, but rhetorical; the correctness that grammar could secure makes a brief and feeble showing.

I have yet to see a list of a similar sort that is not brief and feeble. "It is me" seems to come first to the mind of every believer in grammar for correctness; this is likely to be followed by "between you and I," a double negative, "he don't," "you was"—and very soon thereafter comes "etc." Grammar rules cover only a few kinds of blun-

ders. And, even among the few, the rules, as general truths of language, may not be valid. A French grammar rule says that the equivalent of "it is I" is wrong; double negatives were grammatically correct in England not long ago; Noah Webster's grammar taught "you was" as the correct expression, not even mentioning "you were" in the first edition. A grammar rule has no validity whatever, except as a statement of the fact of social custom. We have to teach custom. And we can produce very little effect by means of rules based on logic; our reliance must be on repeating correct forms over and over and over.

If we go still farther down the scale of the supposed usefulness of grammar, we find no better showing. "Drill on the principal parts of verbs" may perhaps be called grammar, though I doubt it. Much repetition of "see, saw, have seen" is the only way to remove bad manners in the use of *see*. The grammatical principle that "*saw* is a preterit" has only the very slightest effect on wrong speech habits. Except for repetitious drills on correct forms, I doubt whether grammar has any appreciable effect on improvement of language habits. Investigators in schools of education agree to that statement; a host of practical teachers agree. Why study grammar?

The case against grammar is far stronger than men like Utter can describe; for they are, happily, so ignorant of school life that they could never conceive what an inferno grammar may become. They do not know of the deadly fumes that reek every day in American schools. Willie in Concord is rehearsing the quaint truth that "The definite article *the* points out one or more particular objects as distinct from others of the same kind." Susie in San Diego briskly declares that "*Shall* and *should* are often used in the second and third persons in subordinate clauses to express volition which is not that of the subject." Per-

haps thousands of children are learning the six special irregularities of weak verbs, and hundreds may be memorizing the ninety-six prepositions.

The longer you remain in the temple of grammar, the more you will dread the place. It requires the priests to sacrifice time, to use energy amiss, to forgo a wholesome life, to be sunk in superstition. Why—why indeed—study grammar?

I have long wished that some scholarly humorist could learn the inwardness of grammars and picture it fittingly. The materials are abundant and farcical. Our few archaic remnants of subjunctive forms are classed with potential and conditional expressions to make a subjunctive mood for English; a potential mood is solemnly unveiled to youth; conjunctions and indirect objects are said to be modifiers; though literature is full of non-restrictive *that* clauses, grammar asserts that they do not properly exist; grammar tells children that when the Bull volunteers to toll the bell he is personified; it invites their eager minds to the study of *take heed that he escape not;* it tells them that *vixen* is the feminine of *fox,* that they should know the distinction between *indexes* and *indices,* that they should learn plurals like *hippopotami* and *synopses.*

Who would not weep if he knew all about these atrocities? If you think I am growing intemperate or verging to sarcasm, you are quite mistaken. Look at all these idols when I let in upon them one beam of daylight from the actual school world: a well-written note comes to me from a high-school girl who says that her teacher has required her to say in a grammar exercise "There *are* a lot of noise in this room." If I should take the roof off the temple, showing you how our universities hope to secure in freshmen a knowledge of grammar that is never given to the graduates who teach English, you would weep—if you have any serious

conception of what education is. If you could see the little idols in the full glare of day, you would begin to suspect that Mr. Utter was a grammar priest in disguise, a designing fellow who concealed all the worst of the truth.

Why, in the name of all that teachers hold dear, why should children study grammar? Why not join the tuneful band who chant the requiem of the hateful subject?

> Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
> Singing together.

You have read that almost all disputes arise from the failure of human beings to define what they are talking about. We are contentious by nature, preferring a fight to a definition. There lies the explanation of the battle over grammar. All the singing pall-bearers of grammar assume that the corpse is "a code of rules governing correct forms and idioms." Grammar, so defined, we all agree to bury.

There is an entirely different grammar: "the functions of words in sentences." This grammar has nothing to do with right or wrong etiquette; it contains no rules. There is no more superstition in it than in an architect's plans. Its purpose is as matter-of-fact as a knowledge of bones and veins is for a physician's career. It is a staple of secondary education, as indispensable as arithmetic or penmanship. If anyone ever tries to bury the grammar of function, he will need a grave as wide as all high-school courses in composition.

We study grammar in order to know what a sentence is and what a decent series of sentences is. Of course some genius may some day discover quite another way of laying the foundation of composition. The grammar method, we know, is not essential for that small percentage of students

who have a knack of expression; I think I might even teach the upper half of a class without formal use of grammar—if economy of time were no object. The future of grammar may be uncertain. I am only saying that up to 1925 no one has published any system of teaching the rudiments of high-school composition without reliance on a knowledge of sentence elements. Much less has anybody told us how to make rhetorical improvement in the sentences of literal-minded students without a knowledge of the functions of words. Until a new method is discovered, Professor Utter's freshmen will have to learn grammar before they can frame sentences that will please his department.

The details of applying grammar to composition are given in the next chapter. Here I will only quote some evidence that grammar is generally considered nowadays to be as essential as I have said. In 1919 the instructors of freshman English at the University of Wisconsin issued a pamphlet of advice to the high-school teachers of the state. Their judgment about grammar was as follows:

> The vast majority of our high-school pupils are not accustomed to such intellectual habits as might enable them to "absorb" from their reading the knowledge necessary to a correct use of English. Direct technical instruction in English is impracticable except upon the basis of a genuine familiarity with the elementary facts of English grammar.

Every word in those sentences was carefully weighed.

Do you know why *absorb* is in quotation marks and what "absorb from their reading" refers to? It refers to the theory—somewhat true in the very different conditions of a generation ago, and still held by many an academic authority—that rhetorical improvement must come from acquaintance with literary models. In the very year when Wisconsin issued its unequivocal statement President Nicholas Murray

Butler of Columbia declared in an address to the teachers of English in New Jersey: "The only way to teach young people how to write good English is to teach them to read good English." If you can believe that, you will never use grammar. Between Butler's dictum and the Wisconsin declaration there is no middle ground that is tenable. If you suspect that Butler's dictum is in any way mistaken, even if he erred only in not defining his terms, you will know why we study grammar.

Teachers of the mother tongue in France have never discovered that reading is the only route to composition. They rely on a study of grammar, which begins early and lasts long. A few sentences from *How the French Boy Learns to Write* will indicate their faith:

> The chief aim of grammatical exercises is a mastery of the tools of everyday expression. . . . French teachers take the position that if a boy has anything to say, his ability to say it well must eventually depend in large measure upon his skill in handling the sentence, and that this skill must come in part from deep-seated, long-established knowledge of sentence elements. . . . Regular practice in these fundamental matters [of sentence analysis] makes it almost certain that the pupil will be able to handle the sentence with readiness and sureness.

There are a number of minor reasons for grammar, proper enough in their way, which ought to be glanced at before they are dismissed. (1) In some cases the principles of syntax may be helpful. For example, highly educated people sometimes trip on *whom*, and will continue to trip until they understand how to dissect relative clauses. I have heard of a university professor who, for lack of grammar training, could not tell whether *me* or *I* was correct after *between*. Grammar for correctness is not entirely negligible. (2) All teachers of foreign or classical languages

need a basis of knowledge of English grammar. But they sometimes clamor for topics that are not important to us English teachers, and they are apt to demand certain modes of teaching that are not good policy in English—for example, a French teacher wants *his* and *my* taught as adjectives. The demand that we help foreign languages must be weighed, not rashly honored. (3) I think grammar is good "mental discipline"; but that objective is in bad odor, and discipline can be had in plenty of other ways. (4) Grammar would be almost worth while just as an informational subject—if we had a great deal of time to spare. (5) Grammar may be worth while, in advanced classes, as a kind of "science of language." All these reasons taken together amount to very little, not enough to warrant the teaching of grammar in a crowded curriculum.

The real and potent reason is that a large fraction of all our students in school and college do not know what a sentence is, that until they know, we cannot teach composition, that composition is considered the most important subject in school, that educators everywhere are determined that a knowledge of sentences shall be taught, and that the only known way of conveying the knowledge is a study of plain syntax. The colleges of Indiana once made a concerted effort to find out how many of their entering freshmen knew the difference between a phrase, a sentence, and two sentences; barely fifty per cent had any understanding of this basic rudiment of composition. It is hard to believe that the colleges of this state are in a worse plight than the colleges of other states. Indiana has attacked its high-school illiteracy by a grammar method, and no other state has faith in any other method. Until a student knows what a verb is, what mere verbals are, what appositives are, what subordinate clauses are, what conjunctions and relative pronouns are, what independent clauses are, he cannot know

what a sentence is. It is true, of course, that a gifted minority of students (possibly three per cent, or even five per cent) can learn the distinctions by the "feel" of them, without any formal analysis or terminology. But the ninety-five per cent, if they are to be taught definitely and without waste of time, must advance by the grammar route. At least, that is generally accepted doctrine today. If you can see why it is wrong, well and good; you will know how to be a heretic or martyr. This chapter attempts no more than to describe for you the prevailing faith of the period.

Do *you* know what a sentence is? Quite likely you are so familiar with literary customs that the groups of words in your own composition are always true to good form. But you should know that a considerable proportion of high-school teachers do not know even so much. The Illinois Association of Teachers of English once printed in its *Bulletin* an account of an informal test to which the members submitted themselves and which showed that many of them did not know what a sentence is, and so could not enforce the first and greatest commandment of the recently adopted list of essentials for the state. And ability to follow your own instincts is of small use in teaching. Let me illustrate. You may know how to find your own way about, for your own purposes, in Boston or Los Angeles, but may still be entirely incompetent as a taxi-driver, who must take all sorts of other people to all sorts of other places on errands altogether different from his. As a teacher of English you must know the whole map of sentences. Until you study it and walk all the streets, you will not conceive how long some of them are, how they run into one another, and what the traffic regulations are. Play that you are being examined for a driver's license in Sentence City and answer the quiz on the next page:

1. Is *indeed* a conjunction or an independent adverb? Which is *so?*

2. Of what importance is the distinction between a conjunction and an adverb?

3. Is *for* a coördinating or a subordinating conjunction? What bearing has this question on the matter of sentence-errors?

4. Is a comma before a coördinating conjunction a necessity or a penal offense? Or is it a matter of indifference?

5. If all English authors except Doctor Johnson have written *which* clauses as sentences, why are children forbidden to imitate them?

6. What is the difference between a run-on sentence and a comma sentence?

7. Are there any verbless groups of words which students must be required to punctuate as independent statements?

8. When are commas permissible between independent statements?

9. When may a question properly be separated from an independent statement by a comma?

10. How do appositive nouns and infinitives cause sentence-errors?

If you are an amateur, those questions will sound highly technical; you will suppose that only a grammar-fiend could propose them as valid in elementary work. If a veteran read them, he would recognize the most obvious, everyday necessities for teaching every member of a class to know surely what a sentence is.

Now for a little secret, which you must never breathe to any school authority who is advising you: Unless he is a devotee of grammar, he does not know the answers to the ten questions, does not believe they are of use, will tell you passionately that you must not set your feet in such a

morass of technicalities. Hear him with tactful respect. But in the back of your mind consider the secret message that I now whisper to you: He is very fond of the *product* of the grammar mill; he gives himself indigestion by frequent raving at the product of any other known process of teaching what a sentence is. So, if you wish to stand well with him, listen respectfully to his jeremiad against grammar—and resolve to find out for yourself whether you can use grammar.

Take your time and be wary. Perhaps your principal does not believe in grammar; perhaps he will be eager for it and will expect you to teach it all in ten weeks; perhaps your class will be so untrained, and you so unfamiliar with the method, that you had best not wear yourself out against such odds; perhaps your own taste and faith will lead you to try your own devices and explore for a Northwest Passage around grammar. Supply the other perhapses that fit your own situation. You can never succeed by dutifully following what is set down in a book. You must feel your own way to your own program, or follow what your school prescribes.

Probably "you" are a woman. You like things tidy and pretty, and you feel as if you were sniffing at the door of a laboratory. That is a fair metaphor. It seems to me as if our education has been afflicted with a plague of false sentences and as if there can be no health in us until some physicians have dissected the carriers of the disease. Many of the workers have been women, quite as dainty as you, who have bred cultures of *indeed* and *so*, have made rather painful injections into ailing classes, and have demonstrated to their complete satisfaction that the germ is *Ignorantia syntacticalis*. They have abandoned all the Victorian rites of dieting and fumigating with literature. They inoculate with grammar. They get results. They regard skeptics

like you as a sort of old-fashioned medicine-men. Their practice with conjunctions and semicolons saves life.

Grammar is much more than a remedy. It is a mode of producing a series of pleasing sentences. If you are a novice, that appears to be a modest claim, but to an old member of the brotherhood it seems the greatest of all claims. The first time you find that you have altered some boy's monotonous sentences to a tolerable series of consciously varied sentences, you will feel the thrill of a great task well done. The ordinary literal-minded boy cannot vary his sentences until you show him how to put modifiers early in the sentence, to use complex sentences, to use phrases and verbals, to use appositives, to avoid the overplus of the simple and compound sentences. So long as you advise him in general terms, his mind is as barren as ground that is merely talked to. If you want him to use phrases and clauses for improving style, you must show him what they are. And you cannot show him until you have instructed him in adjectives and adverbs and nouns—and all the normal constructions of our language. That means teaching grammar—not for the sake of grammar, but for the sake of improving style.

CHAPTER VI

GRAMMAR FOR COMPOSITION

A. For Improving Style

The three chapters on grammar would seem to have a more logical order if this one came last, after the chapter that describes teaching. But it is a better logic to postpone that chapter, for the reason that no one can teach effectively until he believes in a purpose. Grammar is never taught, never takes root and grows in the student's mind, unless our work is inspired by the conviction that it counts for something. If you do not know how you are going to apply your week of work with prepositions, you will be making idle motions. If you know that your work never will be applied, your heart will not vitalize what you do—in short, your teaching will not "stick." No question is asked by high-school teachers with more despair than "Why does grammar never stick? Why do the years of work in the grades slip away and leave nothing for us to build with in high school?" I have long probed for the answer. Probably the reason is that the teaching has been done without conviction, without desire and purpose. If you have no view of the goal that lies ahead, Chapter VII will seem dead routine to you. If you can first catch the vision of a Beulah Land where agreeable sentences flourish, the whole journey of grammar can be a cheerful pilgrimage.

When I invite you to take a survey of "style," you think of the qualities in Pater and Stevenson. These are deli-

cately discussed by critics in terms of rhythm, parallelism, periodicity, tone, mood—never in terms of grammar. I wonder why. It would be fun to write a chapter on style as the management of grammatical elements. No artful sentence is built of tones and moods; its tone and mood are manifested to us by a manipulation of elements of syntax, as witness the following sentence from Ruskin:

> And indeed, if there were to be any difference between a girl's education and a boy's, I should say that of the two the girl should be earlier led, as her intellect ripens faster, into deep and serious subjects; and that her range of literature should be, not more, but less, frivolous, calculated to add the qualities of patience and seriousness to her natural poignancy of thought and quickness of wit; and also to keep her in a lofty and pure element of thought.

If I am a dilettante, expatiating on that sentence, of course I dwell upon its parallelism and its rhythms. But if I am a mason, trowel in hand, telling an average apprentice how the structure of words was erected, I must show him:

1. The *if* clause that comes before the verb it modifies.
2. The pair of noun clauses, objects of *should say*.
3. The *as* clause tucked in to modify.
4. The passive participle that compactly modifies *range*.
5. The pair of infinitives that modify *calculated*.

So long as my apprentice fumbles with abstractions like tone and parallelism, he will never set up any portions of a wall with mortar.

But turn away from all that labored finesse in style. I simply wanted you to know that the high-school Beulah is not "style" in the critical sense.

Neither is it the style that is advertised by a sign-board: "This Way to Clear Thinking and Cogent Self-Expression." The exhorters who erect that sign mean well, but never furnish any map or compass; beyond it you will find a desert

strewn with the bones of seekers after style, who died because there was no road, nothing to eat, nothing to drink. Here on my desk is a book that is typical of all these generalized guides to style. The first thirty-four pages are devoted to this sort of preaching: "Style is in your blood and temperament and way of saying things. But it's a high art and must be laboriously cultivated. . . . The purpose of the previous paragraphs has not been to teach technique and method, but to inspire a feeling." Then follows a barren waste of eighty-four pages of "Words and Phrases Often Misused," where we learn that "alright" is not in the dictionary and that England's most learned philologists are wrong when they use *stop* for *stay;* thereafter come sixty-two pages on "The Art of Writing," a mirage to which the student rushes, mad with thirst, only to fall prostrate as he sees the glittering alkali of "clearness is dependent on the three essentials of unity, coherence, and emphasis." And now you are at the end of the book.

The little region to which I escort you is not the "style" of the masters nor the "art" of an artless textbook. It is just a homey valley where potatoes can be grown and where the ordinary pupil can learn to farm. As an illustration of the products I choose the writing of an American woman who had been captured by bandits. She scribbled off a long letter to her sister, describing the experiences she went through; and this letter was published, without any touching-up, in a magazine. As a rhetorical model for college composition it is quite impossible; nine-tenths of its sentences begin with the subject and verb, and there are stringy "and" sentences, and there is not much deft phrasing; the letter has little "style." Perhaps Professor Finesse would consider that my quotation from it had no more merit than the sentences in the parallel column; for his examination would show that the vocabularies are identical. If you can-

not see much to choose between them, you will find this chapter disappointing. There is a great gulf fixed between the two bits of composition, and the bridging of it is the work that grammar can accomplish in school.

HIGH-SCHOOL STYLE	MAGAZINE STYLE
One of the head-men of the village sat opposite me. He was smoking, and a few women and children gathered to look at the "foreign devil." I made them understand that I wanted something to drink, and I said that I wanted it hot, so they sent someone to heat water. I felt a little soft touch on my arm while we waited. I turned, and I saw a little girl scuttle off. She hid behind her mother.	Opposite me sat one of the head-men of the village smoking, while a few women and children gathered to look at the "foreign devil." I made them understand that I wanted something to drink and that I wanted it hot, so they sent someone to heat water. While we waited I felt a little soft touch on my arm and, turning, saw a little girl scuttling off to hide behind her mother.

If the author should see this page, she might exclaim, "Oh, pshaw! Grammar never entered my head while I wrote." Quite true; she had a feeling for sentence variation and had "absorbed" forms that she was familiar with in her reading. She would have been one of the five per cent in a high-school class who could do well without grammar. The ninety-five per cent will not absorb. They must be shown each detail and practiced in it.

A long paragraph will be needed to describe the grammatical differences between the parallel columns. (1) *Opposite me* is a kind of prepositional phrase which the average student would always put after *sat.* (2) *Smoking* is a participle that modifies *one* very closely instead of being set off in a separate statement. (3) *While* is a conjunction which joins an adverb clause; it is blessedly different from "and a

few women gathered." After you have lived a few years in the pitiless blizzard of school "ands," you will know that *while* is the sunshine of Beulah. (4) The pair of *that* clauses after *understand* can be grown in Beulah; they never grow wild. (5) The author has used *so;* does it seem rather similar to the student's *so?* The student's sentence has three clauses; the difference between the two and the three is the difference between a respectable company and a huddled crowd. (6) The second *while* clause comes first in the sentence; only subsoil plowing will enable it to grow there in the themes of the ninety and five. What the untrained student says is "and I saw." (7) Need I point out the difference between the student's little sentence, "She hid," and the author's infinitive *to hide?* After you have been a composition gardener for a few years, the two ways of expressing the idea will seem as unlike as pigweed and carrots.

Professor Finesse has never thought much about the carrots in his soup. They are just small bits of yellow stuff. Perhaps he knows that they are sections of a cone-shaped substance that conveniently occurs in the market. He never has realized how men plow and harrow and mark a field, how they seed the rows, how they crawl on hands and knees to thin the feathery tops, how they hoe and dig and cart and top and store and bundle for the market—to produce an unconsidered trifle of vegetable.

Sentence variation has to be cultivated. If you take your illustrations from Addison and Scott, the boys will find the recitation an unreality, an appeal to an utterly impossible world where they do not care to live. Successful teachers nowadays stoop to conquer. Would you bend so low for results as to cite a former great pugilist who wrote articles for the *Saturday Evening Post?* Probably not. Such an appeal would seem coarse. But boys would derive

refinement from it. James J. Corbett could never have received his large honorarium from the *Post* if he had not varied his sentences grammatically. He begins with prepositions:

> Like a thunderbolt in the sporting world came the challenge shown below.

In that sentence he used a passive participle to modify *challenge,* and he put the subject after the verb. In the following sentence, although he breaks the Sabbath, he uses an appositive after a dash, as well as several other laudable constructions:

> So I bought a box and went down there unaccompanied, one Sunday night, hoping that I might have luck enough to run across someone who would be interested in backing me—a long chance, but I thought I would take it.

And think of a passive participle coming first in the sentence, like this:

> Seated in a box opposite to mine, with a party of friends, was a young lady I knew.

Even a dull boy could, if he tried, emulate Corbett by using one subject for three verbs: "I went, was introduced to her friends, and was invited to join them for the evening." Every boy in your class would naturally say, "He sent me his check for this sum"; and that is a normal, proper sentence. But if all sentences are like it, the total effect is a monotony that is uncouth and improper. James J. Corbett said, for variety, "For this sum he sent me his check."

Ladies may shrink from pugilism as an incentive to better style, for it is much purer and "nicer" to refer to Rupert Brooke. Yet, since this kind of shrinking sometimes makes

English sickly, I beg all women teachers of boys to think prayerfully over the idea in the rest of this paragraph. A boy is not a woman. A boy is not "nice." Boys—I mean all those who are not young Rupert Brookes—have a queasy feeling in the stomach when you appeal to any "nice" model. They hardly realize this and will not tell you about it, but the fact is that they are not uplifted. The fact is far worse: they are repelled from English whenever it is made nice. Of course they ought to feel different, and of course they are a rascally, reprobate lot, and of course many sensitive ladies will feel it their duty to alter the nature of boys and win them over to a love of nice models written by nice men. They will girlify English so long as boys are not women. A boy—that is, any boy that girls want to marry—will not respect English until he sees that it is worth while in a fighting world where there is a definite way of training for victory. Boys respect the kind of grammar that shows them definitely how to avoid clumsiness and monotony and kiddishness. If any woman can sense this fact and can teach grammar as *a training to overcome weakness,* she will cultivate style. And I think that the idea applies to most of the girls of this age.

I will give a scheme of the principal ways in which sentence structure can be improved by grammar. Don't raise your hopes very high, for grammar is not magic and will not make silk purses out of porcine ears. While you look through the nine ways of improving sentences, think as the wise poet did who exclaimed, "The little more, and how much it is!" The little more that grammar can produce seems tiny to the literati; it is an immensity in school.

You will find when you are cultivating certain types of sentences that pupils always suppose the models are "good" as compared with the "bad" types, like the short ones or those that are compound with *and.* So be unwearying in

your repetition of the fact that all kinds of sentences are good, that even a string of four independent clauses might be good for variety. English literature is largely composed of simple and compound sentences; they are good, excellent. But a monotonous series of them is bad. A series of complex sentences is bad if it is monotonous. A series of those superfine sentences beginning with prepositions will be bad if it is monotonous. Our whole campaign is to do away with sameness and to secure variety.

If we are good generals, we shall not strike out aimlessly toward the abstraction that we call "variety," for it means nothing to those literal minds that we seek to improve. We must start with specific conditions. Since all mediocre school writing is monotonous because of three prevailing habits, we put a ban on them:

1. Beginning too often with the subject and verb.
2. Using too many short simple sentences.
3. Using too many sentences compounded with *and* and *so*.

All our emphasis must be on "too often, too many"; the types are excellent in themselves if they do not dominate the style. Thus the beginning of operations is negative—"thou shalt not have too many." Theoretically we should have to be afraid of making the taboos too strong, but actually we are in no such danger; for the habits of students will furnish more of the familiar types than are needed for variety.

All the rest of our maneuvers are positive: "Here is a way of avoiding the taboos, and another way, and another way."

1. Something before the subject. (*a*) A mere solitary adverb coming first in the sentence may be as fair as a star when only one is shining in the sky. "Often I had looked at the lawn-mower in the window." You do not understand

my rhapsodizing about that position of *often*—do you? You would if you had, like me, taught ten years without knowing enough to show boys how they could escape from the unending sameness of "I had often looked."

(*b*) An adverb clause which comes first in the sentence will mean nothing to you if you cannot look back through long years of "It was, so he." In such a vista "Because it was," coming first in the sentence, gleams with a heavenly radiance. A sentence that begins with *if* or *although* or *unless* may be a certificate that Thomas has burst the Philistine cords. Beware of *as* and *since*, because they tend to artificiality; *after* and *when* may grow too rankly; but otherwise any subordinating conjunction at the beginning of a sentence is blessed.

(*c*) Each year during the last decade I have realized increasingly the value of prepositions at the beginning. A professional writer often opens a sentence with *during* or *between* or *among;* an untrained student almost never does. The effect of a few such prepositions in a series of sentences is surprisingly great. Even the most matter-of-fact boy can learn to use them, and we can all enjoy teaching them when we see that they improve style.

(*d*) Whenever a student places a modifier at the beginning of a sentence, he has made a somewhat periodic effect; for a sentence is periodic when all the modifiers come before the last word. I have never made much direct use of the formal term "periodic," but it can be a good background for a well-trained class. Weak or ambiguous modifiers are very often at the end of a sentence; they are likely to stow themselves neatly if a student can think of a more periodic arrangement, of putting them early in the sentence. And he cannot be trusted to transpose modifiers until, by long training in grammar, he can recognize modifiers and readily tell what they modify.

(*e*) An object can come first occasionally, and without undue strain:

This I thought I would buy for Uncle David.

Sometimes a stolid boy finds it possible to write an object clause first:

What the girl wanted I couldn't imagine.

(*f*) A predicate adjective or noun can once in a while begin a sentence without sounding affected:

1. Worse still was the nasty smoke.
2. But a gentleman he was, for all he was a cook.

(*g*) The verb can come before the subject, even in very colloquial sentences:

1. After that came a long pause.
2. In went my penny, and down rattled the box of matches.

The inversions suggested in (*e*), (*f*), and (*g*) will result in artificiality if undertaken often or if they are made the subjects of class exercises; the devices in (*a*), (*b*), and (*c*) are regular enterprises in sentence-making.

2. The four forms of sentences. What proportion of eighth-grade teachers, when they have exercises in distinguishing the four forms of sentences, ever show pupils that these types are useful for breaking up monotony? If there is no such suggestion in a school, only the exceptional child will write anything but indicative sentences; a little pressure from the teacher could secure an occasional imperative or interrogative or exclamation:

1. Guess how I felt when I heard that whistle.
2. Have you ever really looked at a snowflake?
3. How strangely that kitten is acting!

Direct quotations are not exactly grammatical elements, but they should be mentioned here as a way of varying sentence forms to give life to themes.

3. The three structural types of sentences. When any class is thoroughly familiar with the three structural types of sentences—simple, complex, and compound—it can see a dozen easy ways of varying them. Simple sentences are endlessly variable, a richer field by far than complex sentences. By the use of prepositions, verbals, and appositives simple sentences can be made to give maturity to style. Here is a very commonplace journalistic sample, the first part of which could be imitated by students:

> Players then, as now, received quite a lot of money for working, over and above study and rehearsals, three hours a day—six on Wednesdays and Saturdays—to keep the public more or less amused.

If you found something comparable to that in the writing of a girl who was a stranger to you, shouldn't you know that she had an instinct for style, or had been well trained? Any boy of reasonable intelligence could learn to make a sentence like this:

> Some of the detectives were pacing up and down, exchanging mysterious jokes, looking sometimes at her, sometimes at an iron machine with a complicated arrangement of wheels and screws.

That is a De Quincey sentence after three slight alterations in diction. Complex sentences will grow in a profusion of forms if a class is familiar with the many kinds of noun clauses, with relative clauses, with other sorts of adjective clauses, with the multitude of adverb clauses; only a scanty growth can be expected in the themes of students who have

not made intimate acquaintance with all sorts of subordinate clauses. Compound sentences are usually our bane; but if a student has learned to separate two clauses by a semicolon, without a conjunction, he commands a useful variant. If he learns to use three independent clauses in one sentence, showing by a semicolon that one is set off against the combined effect of the other two, he can make himself appear as a "clear thinker" or a "subordinater of his thoughts." Have you ever seen an untrained student use a short compound sentence after a long simple one? Mere enforcement of homely grammar can secure that effect—which would look particularly artistic to Professor Rhetoricus after he had read a dozen themes made of monotonous sentences.

4. Verbals. What have passive participles ever meant to you as instruments in composition? or infinitives? or gerunds? Read the following sentences deliberately, estimating how good they would seem to you if they came unbidden from the pens of your students, and observing that their structure depends on manipulating verbals:

1. One began to move the machine and work the screws, or raise the clanking grates and framework.
2. The suffering caused by that one little pebble, lodged under my heel, became unbearable.
3. See her standing under the chandelier, receiving her guests, in her white satin dress covered with lace.
4. Behind me the jungle seemed to move—to come gliding down the sloping shore like a green tide, swarming with all sorts of life.
5. I thought of Aunt Sabra's golden rule: never to hate, but always to pity.
6. His wife was with him now—a slip of a woman, half starved, her lip bleeding, and her pinched, white face oddly shapeless, looking as though permanently disfigured.

When I read a diatribe against grammar, I wonder whether the writer never heard of beauties brought into boyish composition by a familiarity with verbals. Nominative absolutes and infinitives in apposition are not dead technicalities to a live teacher who will use them.

5. Modifiers before and after the verb. Unless you make definite efforts to have the knowledge of phrases and clauses applied, you will forever read this order of ideas:

1. Dale was almost twenty years old at that time.
2. Webb saw that she was tugging at the cord by looking at a little mirror concealed in his palm.

Modifiers will always be allowed to straggle to the end, where they are properly placed two-thirds of the time, but where they are wearyingly wrong if placed all the time. Any girl who cares a bit for lighting up her sentences could learn to put modifiers between the subject and verb, or between a verb and its object:

1. Dale, at that time, was almost twenty years old.
2. Webb could see, by looking at a little mirror concealed in his hand, that she was tugging at the cord.

6. Words in series. A series of words or phrases or clauses in parallel construction is often too labored an artifice for young people to imitate, but a pair of phrases, a pair of similar infinitives, two or three subjects of one verb, two parallel noun clauses, etc., may often be well within the power of an average boy when someone has shown him the trick:

1. There was a look of self-confidence about him, of assurance that he knew just what to do.
2. I told him to act like a man, not to bellow in that childish way.

3. The neat row of books, the accurate lineup of five sharp pencils, and the tidy assortment of papers showed what a methodical fellow he was.

4. Winslow muttered that he knew his own business, that he didn't want any help from us.

7. *The compound verb.* One kind of series is so commonly worth while that I regard it as the most valuable of all the devices for variation: using two verbs (sometimes three or four) for one subject. The greatest use of this construction is to avoid the dreary compound sentences that repeat a subject:

Silas was curious to see what she would do, *and so he* determined to find out.

It is a red-letter day in education when a student discovers that there need not be any second subject for the second main verb, like *lit* in the following sentence:

Ritchie tossed his lunch-box overboard as calmly as if it had been a bit of egg-shell, *and then lit* his pipe like a man who has dined comfortably.

When a student becomes conscious that a second subject is not needed, can usually be dispensed with, ought to be dispensed with part of the time, he is a different creature stylistically. When a teacher has this objective in mind, he finds compound verbs in simple sentences an exciting subject.

8. *Appositives.* The more you compare literary models with school composition, the more you will see that an outstanding difference is the use of appositives. Even the student who is perfectly able to give an account of all the appositives in a chapter will seldom introduce them into his writing until he has been told to, and told to, and told

to. Appositives are peculiarly a mark of maturity and thoughtfulness, yet immature and heedless youths can be trained to use them rather naturally. Of course nouns are the easiest for him to manage, as a substitute for a needless clause or sentence:

> Rapidly the Conover Company was planning out everything needed for progress—a site, a railroad switch, a bond issue, a sales force.

An infinitive in apposition is much more common in spontaneous writing than you may suppose; in fact it is one of the principal causes of the "half-sentence fault," for a student often sets it off as if it were a complete statement, thus:

> Tom Sawyer had been commanded by his Aunt to do a job that he thoroughly hated. To whitewash a long fence when all the other boys were free to play.

A dash and a small letter after *hated* would convert the error to an admirable sentence. Gerunds can be in apposition, and noun clauses. Adjectives and participles can modify in an appositive way, put alongside the words they describe and set off by commas. Appositives are a whole realm of grammatical improvement of style.

9. Parallel constructions. The topic of this paragraph is negative as compared with the previous eight topics. Parallel constructions are too formal for cultivation in school. But they occur with so much frequency that the composition of any class above the ninth year will contain many boggles if there is no understanding of the elements that ought to be parallel. The ungrammared student is likely to say, "Skippy was gazing at a window full of wonders—an aluminum house, an animated Santa Claus, and there was a team of reindeer that," etc. You suppose, with some truth,

that this can be set straight without reference to appositives; but if you require a class to describe what is wrong with the sentence as it stands, you will see a revelation. An untrained student cannot analyze what is wrong. Though he may feel that "it don't sound good" and may recast tolerably under pressure, his mind remains uninstructed and will blunder in the same way week after week. Until he can readily explain the constructions of *house*, *Santa Claus*, and *team*, he is not prepared to avoid childish shifts of construction. Until he can readily detect what sentence element follows a *not only*, he will continue to place some non-parallel element after his *but also*. The only way to knowledge and freedom is learning to analyze what is wrong, and there is no way to learn except the grammar way.

The nine ways of avoiding monotonous sentences are not a program of work for improving school style. They are simply indications of what can be done with grammar—provided: that there is ample opportunity for teaching grammar in a school, that teaching and application can be continued over a term of years by teachers who coöperate, that a program of work has been gradually developed and tested in the school, that the devices for improvement are insinuated one at a time and not taught as a system. This chapter can do nothing for a novice except to show possibilities, a path which each teacher should travel only as far as he sees results. "But why," some will ask, "should you not outline a system?" The answer is that three chapters is an inordinate amount of space to fill with such a subject as grammar and that I have already seemed long-winded. The *Pilot Book* described on page 8 gives rather full details, pages 35–50.

Anyone who wishes to experiment with grammar for improving style should try the part that is most generally useful: beginning with a phrase or an adverb clause. If he

finds this device worth while, he will soon be advancing, perhaps insensibly, to other substitutes for the "and" and "so" sentences. That point is the thick of the battle—to do away with *and* and *so*.

I will conclude this section with four comments on the phases of the grammar method from which most confusion arises in arguments about it.

1. *"Style" as a matter of diction.* All laymen and most professional critics judge style by the quality of its diction, by the felicity with which words are chosen to express valuable thoughts. Take for an example this sentence in which Matthew Arnold describes the stricken spirit of Guérin: "Such is this temperament in the frequent hours when the sense of its own weakness and isolation crushes it to the ground." Arnold translated the plain facts into a metaphor, in which the sense of weakness is likened to a crushing weight; and his process is commonly and crudely called "choosing effective words." We know when we read Arnold's sentence that we are in contact with a skilful and imaginative mind that bodies forth thoughts in compelling words; we know that no commonplace mind could conceive such a form of expression; and we naturally attribute the effect to "choosing words." It is always true that in a good style we feel the thrill of artfully chosen words, and that in a barren style we feel only barren words. And it is true that grammar has naught to do with style in this sense. No average pupil can ever achieve style of this sort, for it springs from an innate power of imagination. But the skill which invents a complex sentence and begins it with a predicate adjective can be transmitted by pedagogy. The untrained pupil manages his syntax thus, in a compound form:

Our team was in that condition, and they had been disheartened by a coach who told them how weak and careless they were.

Training in applied grammar would enable him to say,

> Such was the condition of our players, disheartened by a coach who told them how weak and careless they were.

Perhaps the mere difference in syntax seems slight to you; perhaps it seems great. The measure of the difference in your mind will be your measure of how much you care about grammar.

2. "*Subordinating thoughts.*" The logical academic mind sees that a grammar method for improving style is wrong-end-to. Logically we should begin with our thoughts, should see which are of major importance and which are minor, should then assort the minor thoughts into subordinate clauses and phrases. Perhaps the inhabitants of the north star do so. The people of our earth do not. Actual flesh-and-blood authors have no scales in which to measure the relative weights of their ideas in a sentence, and usually do not think of any such process while they compose. They feel their way by shaping sentence elements to produce a fitting variety. Much more do the minds of students work so. If you try to begin with an act of "subordinating," you will be like a teacher of automobile-driving who expounds "doubling a clutch" before he shows how to go into first. Never argue this question with any adviser, and never try to explain your way of securing the "subordination" that is so precious to him; for he will think you are daft. But he will be delighted with the results you can show him, *if you do not reveal how you secured them.* He thinks of modifiers in terms of coherence and could never believe that "begin with a modifier" is fit for any place but a blacksmith-shop. So do not try to explain that, as a matter of fact, in the whirl of things as they are, the little grammar slogans produce what he desires. Leave him at peace in his domain of

things as they ought to be. Those who would uplift us teachers dwell in theory and cannot stomach the facts of a grammar program.

3. *The "clearness and force" theory.* I have never seen any awaking of a boy's mind by preaching about such abstract virtues as clearness and force. Boys will recite glibly enough about those beauties and will believe that the incantation of such rites is big medicine—for example: "Great care must be exercised in selecting the right kind of sentence to use for the special work we want it to do." But the recital of the exquisite truth produces no effect in themes. What counts is to read a monotonous series of sentences from a theme, bringing out the monotony by a sing-song rendering, and then to ask why modifiers might not occasionally come first in the sentence. What counts still more is to read aloud a good sentence—preferably from the work of Master Slowboy, who has the reputation of being utterly inartistic—and praising the sentence and showing how it casts a gleam over the whole page. Masters Bud and Arthur will then wriggle in their seats and will show you next week that they can beat Slowboy all hollow in this easy game of making varied sentences. Pupils dread monotony above all other evils in life. They can learn by familiarity with grammar how many ways there are of avoiding monotony. And the result will be more clearness and precision and subordination and force than you can hope for by any other method I have heard of.

While I am speaking of modifiers I ought to slip in a statement about them which has freed me from many a blunder and foolish notion. It is always stated in textbooks that "modifiers should be close to the words they modify." If so, consider how erroneous is the following sentence of Lowell: "Are we really, then, to doff our critical nightcaps,

in which we have comfortably overslept many similar rumors and false alarms, to welcome the advent of a new poet?" Here we see *to welcome* put almost as far as possible from *to doff*, which it modifies. Any page of literature will prove that modifiers are by no means always to be stowed close to the words they qualify. The only true law is that modifiers must not be confusingly placed. Whenever modifiers are hard to manage, see whether one of them would fit at the beginning of the sentence.

4. *Prejudging by theory.* The program of grammar for style was once outlined to a university class of English teachers. One of them, who had hardly any skill in his own composition, could see no virtue in the program. Another, who had more than amateur ability in composition, declared: "Those ways of varying sentences are worth the expense of the course." The testimonies prove nothing, because they were rashly made before trial. I speak of them to illustrate the danger of prejudging. Only experience can show what grammar may be worth to you.

B. Grammar for Knowledge of What a Sentence Is

I have described how students often mistake an infinitive in apposition for a verb in an independent statement. Here is a drop from a rhetorical mode of improving sentences to the harsh fact that students do not know what a sentence is. To you it seems that I am sliding down hill in my order of topics. The truth is that I wished to capture your attention by taking you up into a high place and showing you all the rhetorical kingdoms which may be entered by way of grammar. If the prospect allures you at all, it is now time to explain that the promised land can never be entered except by the grim pass named Sentence Sense. A

host of advisers will tell you the contrary and will affably invite you to trust your airplane of artistry, to load your class into it, and to fly with them straightway to bliss. The chances are that you will accept their kind invitation. If you do so, you will add one more to the unnumbered wrecks of pretty little machines that were only strong enough to support teacher. Weigh well the experience of instructors of freshmen in the University of Illinois: "No ordinary amount of correction seems sufficient to eradicate the comma sentence"—that is, to eradicate it in college themes.

Of course you can carry a load of Milton Smiths and Sappho Browns; they weigh hardly anything. But Thomas and Sadie and Sandy and the rest weigh about a hundred pounds apiece, and the best rhetoric motor cannot overcome the force of the attraction that sentence gravitation has for them. What the class needs is a stout grammar truck on which is a good-looking bus-body; this will carry you all comfortably at about fifteen miles an hour over the fairly easy road. Even the aviators of your class—so far as my own experience shows—will arrive in better order if they lash their planes on top of the bus and ride slowly with the rest.

The road is charted in the next chapter. Here I will indicate only its general course. It begins with verbs. Even Milton Smith does not know what a verb is and will have engine trouble if he tries to fly. Many a novice teacher does not know what a verb is; for he thinks that it is broad-minded to include *at* and *glad* in verb phrases, and that *could have been seen* contains a verb and three complements of the verb, and that verbs are despicably easy, and that it isn't nice to fuss so long with the dirty things. Few novices know how to find the subject of a verb; for they suppose that a subject is that metaphysical entity about which the action, being, or state of the verb is predicated.

They suppose that of course such childish matters as subjects and verbs were mastered thoroughly in the fifth grade. The fact is that those matters are seldom understood in the tenth grade. Not until your students can do tolerably well at finding every verb and the subject of it, are they prepared to see that each subject and verb represents a clause. Then they can, in time, learn to tell whether each given clause is independent or dependent. Next they can, if teaching is prolonged enough, comprehend the first and greatest necessity of sentence sense—to wit: independent clauses must not be separated by a comma; there must be either (1) a conjunction and a comma, (2) a semicolon, or (3) a mark for the end of a sentence.

They do not know in the least what a conjunction is. They can learn only by detailed instruction in the difference between the joining words and the independent adverbs that require a semicolon.

At this stage a class can profit by a scheme of the two sorts of sentence-errors:

1. The comma sentence: using a comma (or nothing at all) where there ought to be a semicolon or a period.

2. The half-sentence fault: writing a fraction of a sentence as if it were a whole one.

Before any average student can really comprehend the half-sentence fault, he must know quite definitely and readily the types of the fractions of sentences: subordinate clauses, phrases to which subordinate clauses are attached, verbals that gather many words about them, appositive nouns modified by clauses or phrases.

This necessary knowledge cannot be imparted to a class that is not familiar with the syntax of every part of speech in all its normal uses. I say *all.* It was not by chance that the University of Wisconsin spoke of "a genuine familiarity with the elementary facts." Familiarity is not

gained in a month, nor by selecting merely the topics that we can directly apply; "genuine" is a strong, far-reaching word. No school can insure a genuine, ready, habitual sentence sense until all of ordinary syntax is mastered.

Oh, come now! Don't look so unhappy. Haven't I assured you often enough that this book is not to be swallowed whole? You don't have to believe a thing. I am simply telling you how the case looks to me and Wisconsin. As the years of your teaching go by, you can think the matter over and try any bits of the ideas that fit your temperament. I know what arguments you are thinking of against the grammar bus; I know others that you have never heard of—good strong ones. You, for example, never heard of teachers so mechanically minded that they love to teach grammar and do harm by teaching it and ought to be discouraged from teaching it, and who don't produce better sentences by teaching it. Cheer up.

I know a still stronger argument against grammar, one that I was fifteen years in learning and that has been a great comfort to me: sentence-errors are not errors, because every English author has made them. You may, if you like, use this fact to justify yourself for never marking sentence-errors in your classes. Some very fine people would applaud your stand for the dear old literary traditions. Keep smiling.

It is only fair to tell you, however, that there are nowadays more people who would think you not up to the standards of modern civilization. You see there is this difference between authors and children, that authors know when they make sentence-errors; they are carrying out a purpose. It is now a very general belief among parents and business men that schools ought to strive for this mere humble *knowledge*, rather than for the artistic skill which sprinkles in an occasional sentence-error as a pleasant diver-

sion. All our fervor against sentence-errors is not against skill; it is against ignorance. The prejudice of our age is growing, especially in the universities, against the student who does not know what he is doing when he sets down a hunk of words between periods. All our detailed study of grammar has a simple objective of setting up the knowledge of normal word-groups. Our insistence on normal grammatical sentences is to insure that students can see what they are about when they write. When they have proved their knowledge, they are free to be abnormal.

Even in themes they may have that freedom. It would be possible to form an honor division composed of those who have gone a month without making sentence-errors, and whose prerogative it should be to indulge in two sentence-errors per theme, provided they made a brief notation at the bottom of the page to show that they realized what they were about.

C. Grammar for Punctuation

I dare not sink so low in this early part of the book as to speak of a matter that is often ranked with capitalization and hyphenation. I refer to that speck on your teaching horizon which is called punctuation. Punctuation, you have assumed, is a process of sticking in commas and things according to certain pedantic rules like the one which I memorized at the age of twelve: "A verb and its subject separated by a sentence, or by words representing a sentence, are united by a comma placed before the verb." That is a mystery and a lie. To you, perhaps, most punctuation rules are of that nature.

I will not argue the matter. I will just point out the possibility that some day punctuation will mean to you as much as ten per cent of what it means to me. Even that

tithe will be a large amount. It will include some familiarity with the structure of different types of sentences, an intimate acquaintance that ripens into a real help for Jim and Sarah and May. These average young people can learn many of the elementary uses of punctuation marks without any training in grammar, but cannot qualify in ordinary high-school requirements unless they have the genuine familiarity with syntax.

Thus you can see why the subject of the next chapter is regarded as of prime importance by many teachers today. It is the gateway to the making, punctuating, and varying of good sentences.

CHAPTER VII

THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

Few critics will excuse the length of this chapter on a subject which has often been consigned to the junk-heap. If I had not seen the eagerness of teachers for detailed information, it would never have occurred to me that much needed to be said on so elementary a part of English. Even these fifty-two pages are insufficient to contain the answers to all the queries that have been put to me during the last eight years. The questions of how to form a consistent program and how to unsnarl the contradictions are not answered in textbooks and can be arrived at only by years of trial and error. Many have been left quite untouched in this chapter. Even a number of points that were treated in the first small edition of *What Is English?* have been crowded out because I have learned that others are more desired by novices. The novice will frequently find fault because the particular puzzle that engages her is not spoken of here. But a decent respect for the outraged feelings of the critics compels me to refrain from telling everything I know.

Chapter VII is not to be read, but to be used for reference by any teacher who wants to see what a colleague thinks of this or that matter. It is just a set of numbered paragraphs of comment on certain topics which I have most needed to know and have found hardest to learn about. Don't be distrustful if you find some of the explanations in conflict with your favorite text. There is good authority for every point.

A. General Policies

In 1900 we all taught grammar with untroubled hearts, secure in the faith that we were doing a good work. By 1910 grammar had been so discredited that we were all in doubt and wondered if our labor was not pernicious. Judgments have not yet settled to any general agreement, so that if you should teach in three schools during three consecutive years, you might find three radically different views held by your principals. Hence you cannot hope at present to find a snug harbor of settled conviction in which you will know just what to teach or how to handle and apply it. But you can be much easier in your mind if you know what the cross-currents are and how the gales of opinion blow.

1. What was discredited. The upheaval of 1915 was a revolt against the formalism, the lack of proportion, the mere classifications, the rehearsal of rules, and the empty pedantry of grammar. It was a very wholesome revolution, for which we should all be grateful. But, like all revolutions, it went too far; it proscribed, along with all the unrealities, the training in a knowledge of sentence structure.

2. When grammar does not function. It is true that grammar does not function—under two conditions: (1) that "grammar" means the old-fashioned study of forms and classifications, (2) that grammar is left to do its own work and is not definitely applied with a definite purpose by the teacher. There is some reason to believe that two-thirds of the grammar now taught in our schools does not function. That fact, however, proves nothing about the one-third of purposeful grammar that many veteran teachers believe in as assuredly as if it were a sharp hoe in a weedy garden.

3. Grammar is coming back. All the evidence I can gather from teachers east and west and south indicates that grammar was much discredited about 1915, so that it was

almost abandoned in some places, but that the tide is now returning strongly. Most teachers seem to have heard of "functional grammar" and to believe in it, but not to know very well what it is or where to find it.

4. When should grammar be taught? In one respect opinion about the place for grammar is unanimous: teach it before the pupils come to me. Nobody wants to roll up his sleeves and work for months and months with grammar. Everybody wants pupils who already know grammar. We are willing to review a bit, if necessary; but none of us can conceive that our year is the proper time for any new work. Grammar should always have been mastered in the past. Teachers of high-school seniors surely are correct in this feeling, because everybody must concede that rudiments of composition should be learned earlier; and it seems fair that teachers in the eleventh* year should be able to assume a knowledge of grammar. It seems rather absurd to have students wait till the tenth year before learning what words do in sentences. Now go to the other end of the school system. It must be conceded that the little ones in the first four grades cannot master predicate nominatives, that in the fifth grade they cannot master participles, that in the sixth grade they can hardly begin to study subordinate clauses. Presumably the ordinary sixth-grade child can learn only the simplest beginnings of the syntax of the simple sentence. Therefore most of the teaching of grammar must be centered in grades seven to nine. The seventh year is the great hope of those who plan curriculums; many principals of schools and writers of textbooks would make of this the grammar year *par excellence* and would only review thereafter.

5. No conquered territory. Grammar never will be completed in the seventh year. There is not sufficient mental

*That is, the tenth in some Southern states.

power in pupils of that age. For nineteen years I was free to teach all the grammar possible in an eighth-grade class; I learned how to get rid of many topics, to concentrate on essentials, to improve the methods of attacking; I was finally able, as the standard of scholarship was raised and I grew more skilful, to deal fairly thoroughly with the simpler subordinate clauses. That was the utmost limit I could achieve under exceptionally favorable circumstances. And even these boys needed review, a good deal of review, in their ninth year. This result tallies exactly with a similar experience in a Missouri grade school, where the principal did his utmost during twenty-five years to have grammar mastered at the end of the eighth year; he concluded that the nature of the subject and of the eighth-grade mind made mastery impossible. There is need of a preliminary year (or two?) before the eighth and of a year beyond the eighth. The hope of bunching all grammar in some one convenient section of the curriculum is quite illusory. Grammar is not a little field that can be covered in a little while.

It is rather a process of advancing, with a small set of concepts, to higher and higher exercises. It is as if in the sixth year we made a very elementary round of verb, subject, predicate nominative, object, adjective, adverb, etc.; then in the seventh made a circuit on a higher level—extending farther, in harder material—of verb, subject, adjective, etc.; then in the eighth went still higher and made a wider circuit of the same grammatical topics in harder sentences. We cannot conquer a whole territory of verb and subject in one year; we can learn only the simpler combinations in easy sentences. Next year we advance, on a higher round of the same topic. It may take four years to prepare for understanding a *whether* clause used as a subject, distinguishing it from *whether* clauses used adverbially or appositively. Even in the tenth year, after

three years of efficient teaching, we cannot hope that all phases of verbals and modifying clauses are conquered territory. We must still review, on a higher level, for higher demands of composition, the constructions that have not been mastered. If any teacher understands the meaning of "no conquered territory," he will be saved from much perplexity, and perhaps from despair.

6. "Teach when needed." A notion held by many directors of education is that grammar should not be taught as a detached subject, but should be taken up as occasions arise in class enterprises. In theory this is sound. If I am not a part of a school system, if I can follow a particular child's development for several years, if I know all about the uses of grammar, if the child is exceptionally willing and bright —if, in short, every condition is different from that of any actual teacher in any known school of the United States, then I can teach grammar when needed. It is conceivable that some time, when American education is on a much higher plane than now, a method will be devised for teaching grammar only as the need for an application arises. But not even the beginning of such a method is anywhere in sight at present; any attempts to experiment with it must assume extremely skilful teachers and must be indifferent to a great waste of time. Grammar must be taught as a separate subject.

A practical illustration of "teaching when needed" has come to me from two teachers of journalism who lived two thousand miles apart in very different sorts of high schools, but whose testimony was identical, almost in verbatim details: "Last spring I urged my journalists to use participles. 'What are they?' the class asked in bewilderment. Now I couldn't stop my own work for two weeks to teach participles. I couldn't have taught the subject properly in a month, because the class would have had to have the whole

foundation of grammar laid, perhaps for two years, before it could begin on participles. I wanted a little touch of mature journalistic style. I lost out because of an idle theory that grammar must be taught 'only as the needs arise.' "

Yet the underlying principle of "teach when needed" may be a good ideal and may be potent in the future development of our grammar work. It will never be sensible, however, until every teacher works in a well-developed system, confident that a certain designated portion of grammar has been mastered by pupils before they come to him. No teacher, *by himself*, can teach when needed.

7. *Teach every year.* The wild chaos of grammar will settle some day. Until that happy time you will be likely to find that your class in the ninth or tenth or eleventh year knows no grammar. They have always "had" it, but they never know anything about it. The only safe policy is to assume that your class knows nothing whatever, to begin at the very bottom with recognizing verbs, to proceed as slowly as your course of study will permit, and to lay the foundations that should have been provided two or three years before. In any class, whether school seniors or college freshmen, it may be necessary to begin at the very beginning.*

8. *Make grammar human.* If you believe that grammar is not an empty bluff, have the courage to make it a part of real life. Don't allow it to be a best parlor fitted with haircloth speech. Use illustrations from rough-and-tumble talk —yes, from slangy talk if you can bring yourself so low. This is not catering to bad taste, not cheapening the subject. It is making the subject real. Bill and Si have always supposed that grammar is a sacred cult of worshiping pressed flowers of language. When you open a newspaper

*See, for a striking testimony on this point, Essay 77, page 124, in *English Evidence*, the book made by teachers, described on page 5.

and ask Bill to recite on the verb in "Hanson swatted out a scorcher," you reveal to him that *out* is a real, living adverb; whereas if you appeal to "Faced out the brow of bragging honor," you convince him that the whole matter of adverbs is fit only for paranoiacs. And, for my part, I think Bill is quite justified.

9. Do no parsing. During the first eight years of my teaching I was obliged to have regular old-fashioned parsing. Gradually I woke up to the fact that telling about the conjugation, mood, tense, person, and number was a matter of rote which did not signify; what counted was ability to find verbs and subjects. As soon as I was free, I abandoned all formal parsing and concentrated on constructions of words in sentences—that is, answers to the question "What is it doing?"

10. Be temperate with diagraming. French teachers, we are told, do no diagraming. Instead of an elaborate chart which accounts for the exact function of every word, a simple scheme of analysis is used, in which the general structure of the sentence is shown at a glance. Simplicity is certainly the right aim. My own experience is that a few lines drawn on the board make an analysis livelier and easier to follow. No more is needed than a line for bare subject, predicate, and complements; under each of these may be written, in a column, the modifiers, whether single words or phrases or clauses. This arrangement shows the skeleton of the sentence, the whole subject and whole predicate, all the modifiers, and most of the functions of single words.

11. What topics to teach. Of course your first duty will be to teach what the school requires—perhaps nothing at all, perhaps nothing but irregular verbs commonly misused, perhaps all the wrong rules for forming plurals and distinguishing abstract nouns. So far as you are left to your own devices, your first duty is to begin at the bottom with

verbs and subjects. Do not worry about covering a lot of other topics, for "covering ground" is killing time. As general policy avoid all paradigms, all treatments of form, all classifications, all rules, and all but a few of the most obvious and simple definitions. More than half of the ordinary grammar text has no relation to composition. Your sole concern is with the functions of words in sentences —as subjects, as predicate nominatives, as objects, as modifiers. Keep in mind that the constructions of single words are not studied so much for their own importance as for preparation; your objective is an understanding of the verbals, phrases, and clauses that can be used to improve style. Choose the topics that help in that direction.

Once you are under way, you will have no trouble in seeing what is needed to clear up ignorance. You will, in fact, soon cease thinking in terms of "topics." You will want exercises, always more and more exercises, more hundreds of sentences in which you can teach the distinction between an adverb and a preposition, between a conjunction and a preposition, between a verb and a preposition, between a phrase and a clause, between a dependent and an independent clause. Refer to textbooks in other subjects, use newspapers or story magazines, use editions of classics—use anything that will direct the minds of the class away from "topics" in a book and toward the plain facts of how our mother-tongue forms sentences.

12. Don't fuss with oddities. After you have taught grammar for a decade, you will expect any recitation to yield some odd construction that you have never thought of before; you will learn of many cases in which two ways of explaining are equally logical, but one of which fits better into your general scheme of explanations. English grammar will never be a neat system in which every idiom has its own pigeon-hole. Therefore you must not take the attitude

of a teacher of mathematics or anatomy. Your ignorance may be shown up at any time, and each of two opposed answers may be acceptable. Your interest is always in finding out whether an answer by a student could be right by any process of real thinking. For example: if you are discussing "Next came a box of pecans," there is no conceivable way of arguing that *next* is a subject or *box* an object or *pecans* a subject; but in "He lay down with a groan" you would gladly admit that the phrase may modify either *he* or *lay;* and in "I'm sure he won't" you gladly admit that you haven't any idea what is the construction of *he won't.* Whatever is abnormal may be dismissed with a laugh; whatever is indubitable and common must be strictly required.

13. Must we teach all the constructions? It is true that some constructions have little direct usefulness in rhetoric or sentence sense or punctuation. I have, for example, never made any application of indirect object or adverbial objective; I can hardly detect any use for direct object and predicate nominative—though those are usually considered important and take much time. Yet I teach them thoroughly. In so doing I seem to be guided by a kind of unformulated instinct. Since this has not led me to give up the constructions, I beware of relying on empty logic when I am tempted to abandon them. I am also guided by two bits of logic: (1) If I omit from my schedule such a topic as predicate nominative, I do not know how much I may disarrange the rest of my schedule, how much underpinning I may remove from the parts that are unquestionably needed —such, for instance, as a knowledge of the uses of noun clauses. (2) It does Aleck and Reuben much good to know that they are masters of *every* usual construction in ordinary prose; if I keep them in ignorance of a few constructions, they will lose confidence and will fear the dangers that lurk

in unexplored corners. So I have not yet learned how to pass over any regular construction. You might suppose that "retained object" is a sheer technicality, but you will learn that noun clauses are frequently retained objects ("We were told *that a storm was coming up.*") I have yet to discover that I dare to omit from my teaching any normal function of parts of speech.

B. General Strategy

1. No word is anything by itself. You may say that *was* is always a verb and *desk* always a noun, but you had better not say so. For some day Mary Montague will discover an essayist who said, "I desked it fifteen hours a day," and Sid will quote your remark about "the *was* in this sentence." We may be sure that Browning could have used any word in the language as two parts of speech. The fact may be an intellectual plaything; the principle in the pedagogy of grammar is valuable beyond reckoning. Start with it and never remit energy in dwelling upon it. No word is, in itself, any part of speech; we cannot tell what a word is until we see it at work in a sentence.

The difficulty of establishing this principle is greater than you might suppose, as I will illustrate by describing what happens in the case of indefinite pronouns. "A pronoun is a word used in place of a noun." Very well. Then the italicized words in the following are pronouns:

1. *Each* had his knapsack.
2. *One* never knows his own faults.

Next we learn that "An adjective is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun," and we tackle the sentence:

Each man ran for the other side.

Since we are concentrating on adjectives, we shall probably get fair results with *each* and *other*. But now we review a mix-up of pronouns and adjectives, encountering:

Each one had thought the others had heard about the boat.

Protests will be heard. "Yesterday we called *each* a pronoun." "The book says that *each* is a pronoun."

You think that you will drive them to cover thus: "Yes, but what is a pronoun? How is *one* used? It doesn't modify some understood noun, does it? You couldn't say 'each one *man*,' could you? No. So it stands for a noun, then? Exactly. And what is a pronoun? Then *one* must be a pronoun? What does *each* do? Modifies *one*. Any word that modifies a pronoun is a—what? So *each* is an adjective."

Isn't it easy? It is also easy to go through the rigmarole tomorrow, and next week, and next month. I have known bright boys to need a repetition after five months of almost daily megaphoning the same old idea. It seems a notion contrary to normal mental processes. A spade is a spade. If you use it for poking the fire it doesn't become a poker. A word ought in the nature of things to be something. This calling it one thing today and another tomorrow is not fair.

How is it used in the sentence? Start out strong with that, and never let up. If a pupil, unprompted, by good headwork, argues that *one* modifies an understood noun, and so is an adjective, he ought to be commended. It could be so classified and taught. Even in the case of *others*, where an *s* is added that never is added to an adjective, it is better —early in the course, that is—to commend for a piece of real reasoning than to discredit for not taking the *s* into account. But when your system has been clearly announced, made clear by practice, then the reasoner must bow to the needs of uniformity.

2. The "needs of uniformity." These are not shackles; nobody is having his liberty curtailed. At every point we must emphasize that we are showing the easy way to understanding this queer old English language and to mastering it. Every teacher tries to find the easiest and shortest cuts to knowledge. If a pupil sights an open place and runs to it, shouting, "This is a good path," we like his initiative and hope he really has found an easier way than the one we have been used to. Once in a while students do find new routes. But if the teacher knows about that attractive glade, knows that it leads nowhere, he recalls the young scout. "This is the easy way," he says. "Your way might be good for a person traveling alone who could climb the cliff that lies a mile ahead; but so long as we must all keep together in a class, this road is much better."

3. Don't use double names. One of the needs for uniformity is that we should have a single, unmistakable name for each class of word that we wish to distinguish. "Verbal noun" is, for you and me, a good name, logical and truly descriptive. But even in so clean-cut a case I believe that children learn more easily if they have a separate name, like infinitive or gerund. Much more is it true that "participial noun" gives the lie to our teaching of verbals; for a participle is, by definition, a word used like an adjective. The "phrase" that is used in most textbooks is an entirely vague generality, denoting any group of words that does not contain a subject and verb. Hence it is meaningless in grammar. I have found that it does harm if applied loosely to all sorts of word-clusters that are centered around verbals; so I restrict it to prepositional phrases, and usually to the bare preposition and its object. "Conjunctive adverb" is a needless hardship for pupils; what they need is a sharp distinction between conjunctions (mere joining words) and adverbs (independent modifiers). The distinction is vital in

teaching what a sentence is. If there are only four relative pronouns and if they are a specially difficult class of words, the conception of what they are ought not to be crisscrossed by such a term as "relative adverb." A pronoun is known by a function that is entirely different from the function of an adjective; therefore "pronominal adjective" is a cause of offense. If you use these double names, boys will believe that you have "double-crossed" them.

4. Meaning is not syntax. Many teachers and textbooks discuss syntax by reasoning about the meaning of an expression. It is common practice, for instance, to argue that "for you to act so" means the same as "the fact that you act so" and therefore is equivalent in syntax and therefore is to be called an "infinitive clause." This is sorry business. In the first place, such reasoning furnishes a most perplexing double name, which implies that an infinitive is a verb and has a subject. In the second place, it supplies an entirely new set of words, arranged with entirely different syntax, and then discusses the made-up group of words. Even for grammarians this is wrong-headed; for pupils it is poisonous; for teachers it is disastrous. Our job in grammar is always to talk about the words that are to be analyzed, not some other made-up words.

5. Don't classify by meanings. When we classify adverbs or prepositions by their meaning—as of time, place, mode, degree—we are beyond grammar, in a region of shifting opinions. If I try to find the line between common nouns and abstract nouns, I am puzzling with subtleties of opinion. To distinguish between ordinal and cardinal adjectives may be good Latin drill or good philosophy, but it is wretched English grammar. The true syntax that we need has no concern with scholastic meanings.

6. Don't understand words. All pupils, and apparently most teachers, like to understand a preposition for explain-

ing an indirect object; they prefer to think that a *to* is understood. The school grammar that was most influential a generation ago told students to understand prepositions for explaining such adverbial nouns as "came home," "worth a million"; it even taught them to understand an object in "the boys marched out." You will find that this sort of "understanding words" is a deep-seated longing. It is the most common species of make-believe syntax. If you have any of it in your own bosom, quench it and do not allow pupils to indulge in it, for it leads to misconceptions of what words do in sentences. Of course there are certain standard omissions of words, called ellipses, as in the case of the subject of an imperative, relative pronouns, the participle in a nominative absolute, and other odds and ends. But even in these somewhat questionable cases an ellipsis never alters a construction; it only explains a construction that would otherwise be unintelligible. I do not know any valid reason for ever understanding a word which would change a construction. (For a further comment on this distinction see the last section of the chapter, page 209.)

7. *Don't dissect words.* The labors of grammar are sufficiently large if we explain all words as they stand; we have no time for breaking up such solid words as *overlook* into a preposition and a verb, or such hyphenated words as *two-year-old* into a noun and two adjectives. Grammar can be of some service in showing why there must be hyphens in compound adjectives, since pupils can see that a two-year-old child is not an *old* child and that *old* ought not to stand as a separate modifier. The principle of not dissecting words is now generally extended to long verb phrases like *could have been done.* Formerly it was customary to say that *could* was the real verb, and *done* was a predicate participle, and *have* and *been* were—I don't know what. I don't want students to know.

8. Always begin with concrete particulars. It is generally taken for granted by a grammarian that we ought to begin with the general truth and work down to the particulars. He conceives a sentence as a whole group of words about which a predication is made by another group of words, and he therefore supposes that a child's mind will be happy in the same conception. Now, curiously enough, if this same grammarian did not know clubs from spades and was beginning to learn the game of bridge, he could not begin with the general notion of "establishing length against opponents' declaration of no trump." No, he would act just like the child who begins grammar; he would ask in an irritated voice, "But what is a trump?" I can never begin grammar by talking about "the whole subject." I have to begin with a single word that states and then move to a single word that is the subject of this stating word, and so work gradually from one concrete fact to the next. I have to begin with the barest predicate and the barest subject. From there I work outward and upward. The conception of "whole subject" is the limit which I approach. The same truth holds for the approach to any part of speech or to any construction: first show examples, then show pupils how to recognize other examples, then perhaps offer a bit of a definition to help along, then give any clues that are practically useful, then go on and on detecting the concrete cases in mixed material. I have never met an experienced teacher whose method was essentially different.

9. Discriminating is all that counts. When introducing a grammar topic we try to avoid a mix-up with any other topic, concentrating on the building of the one new idea. This is purely preliminary instruction, which amounts to little. Suppose that we have had such a first lesson in gerunds. Then we move to the next topic, say participles, and introduce that. Now comes the real work: an exercise

that contains both kinds of verbals, which we have to discriminate. A novice is dismayed to find that a lesson in both kinds at once is difficult, though each kind alone seemed easy. There is no reason for discouragement; the difficulty is proof that we have now entered upon real teaching and are accomplishing something. The ideal exercise is one in which the sentences are not assorted topically, but are intermingled, so that the examples of topics are jumbled like this: 1. topic A; 2. topic A; 3. neither topic A nor topic B; 4. topic B; 5. topic A. A series of A's will throw the careless student off his guard and lead him to expect an A where there is none; a blank will tempt him to report what does not exist. This is the sort of training in alertness and carefulness that the world wants us to give.

10. Admit your ignorance. Difficult constructions are specially numerous in common idioms and colloquial language. Be prepared to be "stuck" at any time. It is fatal to pretend knowledge, because you may make a pronouncement that will later be disastrous. The best way out is: "I've never thought of that. I want to make sure. I'll tell you tomorrow." If in the rush of a recitation you make a ruling that later recoils upon you and shows that you were wrong, acknowledge it. Get straight again. There is no other way to keep the respect of the class. But of course you must display as little ignorance as possible. Often you can see the trouble coming and can avoid the encounter. Often the puzzle is of no value to the class, and you can say that you are omitting the oddities. Try to have it understood from the beginning that English syntax is not like arithmetic: a teacher of other subjects knows an answer to every question that can arise; in every elementary grammar there are questions that lexicographers cannot agree about.

11. Correctness is not a matter of logic. There are cases in which usage is uniform—for example, in always using a nominative for the subject of a verb. Since an objective pronoun is always wrong as a subject, we may think we are proving that "Him and me went" is wrong by a logical process. The truth is just the opposite. No logic can make any idiom right or wrong. Correctness is entirely a matter of usage. A grammar rule is valid only when it states what usage is. If I attempt to show by logic that a certain idiom is wrong, I am foolish. One illustration will serve for all cases. What pronoun should be in the following line of poetry?

Whence all but ( ) had fled.

We can argue that, since *but* is a preposition, it must have an object, *him;* or we can argue, as a certain woman once did with great heat in the *Atlantic*, that *but* is a conjunction and that after it should come a nominative, the subject of some understood verb. Either argument is pure trumpery. Usage, at least in poetry, has been almost solidly in favor of the nominative; usage in recent prose is strongly in favor of the objective; therefore students had better use the objective. There's no more about it. Shelley was not ignorant and vulgar when he said to the west wind, "Be thou me"; Sir Anthony was not vulgar when he used "you was"; Quakers are not ignorant when they use "thee had"; grammar cannot convict President Eliot of error when he says, "I et my dinner," or Shakespeare when he says "there's daggers in men's smiles." A grammar rule cannot prove the incorrectness of the speech of Eliza or Elias in your class. What makes incorrectness is a violation of a social taboo that is obeyed by the people we respect. All that grammar can do is to report the taboos.

12. Where can I find authority? Distrust every book. Never believe that you know truth because your pet grammar says thus or so. Every text contains some prejudice and ignorance. By far the most sensible and reliable grammar I know is W. D. Whitney's *Essentials of English Grammar*. Whitney, who was the editor of the *Century Dictionary*, had a clear and sure mind and was the most learned student of language that America ever bred. Though his text is old-fashioned in some few particulars and has only two hundred sixty pages, it is a storehouse of help for times of trouble. The best guide that I know for moot points is *Grammar and Its Reasons*, by Mary H. Leonard. It is not a textbook, but an exposition of the principal topics; it is sound and complete.

13. The four groups of the parts of speech. A class will be in a better mood for work if it can understand that the petty distinctions from day to day are clearing the way for a general view. There are only four kinds of parts of speech: (1) the verb; (2) the name words (substantives)—that is, nouns, pronouns of several kinds, infinitives, gerunds; (3) the modifiers—adjectives, participles, and adverbs; (4) the connectives—prepositions and conjunctions. For my own part, I should never fuss with explaining that the verbals are "part of the verb"; their constructions are always as nouns or modifiers.

14. Advertise the purpose. There will be an opportunity every day to show that the day's little doings have a purpose, a big, good-looking one, toward which the class is headed. If you find an advertising circular which is clumsily worded and read a sentence and show how a knowledge of grammar would have made the sentence attractive and that the knowledge (which, by the way, is worth dollars) cannot be had unless we clear up the little points in today's lesson, then grammar becomes—I believe the pedagoguese

for it is "vitalized." A more immediate and practical purpose is learning what a sentence is. Not one item of the whole grammar program can be omitted in a course which fully teaches what a sentence is. A good objective for a teacher in developing his technique is to learn just how every item does function in the purpose.

C. The Order of Topics

No one can tell what details will be best for any particular class in its peculiar circumstances. But it is possible to describe the order of topics that is most effective and the kinds of emphasis that are needed; for these are elements common to all teaching of grammar. I will suppose, as a typical condition, that you are dealing with a class of ninth-year pupils who are ill-prepared.

We must begin with recognizing the parts of speech. The first move is to set up the simplest possible definition as a guide, and the definition is always in terms of *use*. A noun, for example, is any word that is used as a name. Realize at the outset that school definitions are not academically complete, that an analytic mind can rip them all to pieces, that thoughtful students will detect exceptions and shortcomings. Adjust your mind to the idea that you are not engaged with logical niceties. You are preparing to show ignorant boys and girls the plain, ordinary, major facts about the structure of English sentences; and a preliminary step is to get the concept of that kind of substantive which is ordinarily called a noun. The academic mind (which already knows grammar) would like to start with the general term "substantive" and to subdivide this into proper nouns, common nouns, abstract nouns, verbal nouns, personal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, etc., etc. Dismiss all thoughts of such schematizing. Even Professor

Logicus, if he knew no grammar, would have to begin with a view of the ordinary facts, one by one, getting approximate ideas; then, and only then, could he understand the concept "substantive." Pupils need to see nouns.

Suppose that a class were quite ignorant of nouns. You would in the first recitation not find fault with a pupil for saying that a pronoun or a gerund is a noun, or for failing to see that *rise* is a noun. You take every opportunity for siding with pupils in their decisions and agreeing that "it is a kind of noun" or that "it really doesn't seem much like a name." From this most rudimentary beginning to the high altitudes of an adverbial *whoever* clause our strategy is always to encourage any reasoning in which there is any trace of good sense, and to poke fun at every blundering guess, every failure to apply the easy tests that have been made familiar.

Another part of the strategy is not to expect too much of a definition, not to take the attitude of conforming everything to an abstract formula. "Used as a name" is not the only clue to nouns; we can get help from the handy test of "Could it naturally have *a*, *an*, or *the* before it in this sentence?" We are feeling our way to a recognition of what the world has agreed to call nouns.

When we take up pronouns, we start with the definition, "a word used in place of a noun." We do not show this as an abstraction, and then show the subdivisions of the bodiless vagueness. No, we begin with actual things: *he, it, they, she, them.* These are pronouns. Then we show another group of things: *one, some, each.* These are pronouns. The class is told that it cannot learn all about pronouns in a day, or in a week; in fact the relative pronouns are quite a study in themselves, more advanced, to come later. It is good policy to discourage any haste for a view of the whole subject of pronouns; it is better to invite the class to attend

to just these things that are shown today. "Learn one thing at a time," we tell them, "and pretty soon the whole subject will clear up."

Variety in a grammar program is as necessary as in meals or sentences. Don't plan to master nouns, then to master pronouns; but have a preliminary view of each in a lesson or two, and then take up verbs. Thus you will soon be ready for the active work of seeing "what nouns and pronouns do in sentences." Whenever a verb is found, the pupil must ask, "Who or what could have seen? Who or what might have been drowned?" The answer is the subject of the verb. Have you ever realized that any proper definition of a subject is a metaphysical subtlety? If a pupil has to rehearse "that about which the action is predicated," he is thereby wafted to realms of the esoteric where flesh and blood cannot live. If you try even so matter-of-fact a definition as "that which is talked about," you will still be in metaphysics; for in "he found a thousand-dollar bill" we are surely talking about the bill. But asking "who or what?" is a kind of game; pupils who forget to ask it are always in danger of making absurd answers, and those who do take time to ask are sure to be right.

I will now sketch briefly the best order of grammar topics, and will then, in Section D, describe various ways of attacking and emphasizing in each part of the program.

My own choice for a beginning is to start with the verb, because that is the most active and important and common part of speech. After one or two lessons in recognizing "the whole verb and nothing but the verb" I should have a lesson in nouns, then one in personal pronouns, supplementing each recitation with some selecting of verbs and their subjects. But beginning with nouns and pronouns is more common, and you may find it easier till you have had a year's experience.

The verbals may be "parts of the verb" in a treatise on grammar, but in school they are fenced off as "those things that are decidedly not verbs," and they are not to be taught until a class is somewhat familiar with the constructions of all the other parts of speech. Verbals are hybrids presenting some peculiar difficulties, and ought to be postponed till each element of the hybrid is understood. In all early work with verbs our labor is to show that verbals are *not* verbs, because they lack the essential power that defines a verb: they do not make statements. We can cheerfully bear the charge of being dogmatic and unreasonable, for our eyes are set on a high goal: training pupils to know that a verbal cannot form a clause or a sentence.

On no account teach objects of a verb until you have habituated the class to the thought of predicate nominative. For some reason every child is familiar with "object of," has been taught to say it, likes to say it, always will say it. Give the class no opportunity to indulge this passion. Show the predicate nominatives first if you wish to save time and effort.

Beyond nouns and pronouns and verbs most of the work is with modifiers. Thus far we have dealt with the skeleton of sentences; now we are ready for the flesh.

An adjective is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun. It may come just before the modifying word or be set after it in an appositive position or be a predicate. It may describe or simply point out or tell the number of. We do not classify, but hunt for each and every word that "belongs with" a noun or pronoun in some kind of modifying way. The class should be shown every now and then that the work is not calisthenics for mental discipline, but is preparing for those useful participles that teachers of journalism covet and for the whole field of relative clauses.

You would naturally expect to take up next the other

kind of modifiers, adverbs. But prepositions fit better here. The distinction between adverbs and prepositions remains a mystery if you take up adverbs first. There are other reasons: prepositions are lively words and take objects, which is a great merit; prepositions are often so closely allied with verbs that verbs cannot be taught until prepositions are understood; prepositions are not in themselves modifiers, and it is better to have some acquaintance with them before there is too much familiarity with the modifying adverbs; the whole program of work is more diversified if prepositions are sandwiched between the kinds of modifying words. But what is said in this paragraph applies only to beginnings; before we can explain prepositional phrases fully we must know what adverbs are.

Any definition of preposition that I could ever invent is a hindrance; it is the one part of speech that I introduce without a definition. It is "a little word that always has an object." The work with prepositions is (1) to recognize them by the object that is always there, (2) *not* to say that they modify, but (3) to say religiously that "the phrase modifies." Thus we reach a true conception of what a preposition is and can finally almost define it: a word that has an object and that forms a modifying phrase.

At this point, as everywhere along the line of grammar progress, we cannot have mastery until we have taken up the next part of speech, adverbs, and have returned to discriminate between prepositions and adverbs. In Section D you will find that much is said about *discriminating* as the prime purpose in grammar. This is specially true of prepositions and adverbs.

An adverb is a word that modifies anything except a noun or pronoun. It usually modifies, as the standard definition puts it, a verb, adjective, or other adverb; but an adverb sometimes seems to modify a preposition ("standing

almost in the center") or a conjunction ("leaving *just* when they came"); and of course adverbs frequently modify infinitives and gerunds. The subject of adverbs is a big one, with many curious ramifications, and may easily deteriorate into splitting hairs and pecking at airy nothings. Keep out of the pettinesses; keep your thoughts far ahead and aloft, on those verbals and phrases and adverb clauses that are to animate composition. It is idle to classify adverbs (as of space, time, degree, etc.) and idle to debate some of the queries as to what they modify. Accept any possible answer and be ready to exclaim approvingly, "Good for you! I never thought of that. It could be so. But teachers generally say that it is the other way."

Now a class is prepared for verbals. These are words which, in our classroom parlance, "come from verbs and are somewhat like verbs, but are not verbs." They are two parts of speech in one and often show plainly the qualities of both. Thus in "Paying promptly is wise" the gerund is modified by both an adverb and an adjective.

I am sure that it would be simpler and more in line with functional grammar to teach that there are only two kinds of verbals, noun and adjective. For many years I taught, as Whitney's grammar does, that *to do* and *doing* are infinitives if they are used like nouns. But general custom has decreed otherwise because of the difference in form; it calls *to do* or *do* an infinitive and *doing* a gerund, in their noun uses; it calls *doing* and *having been done* participles if they are used like adjectives.

Conjunctions are of two kinds, quite unlike in their function and difficulty. The coördinating conjunctions are very few, are very easy, and hardly need attention as a special topic. They can be taught incidentally at any stage.

But subordinating conjunctions are in a higher sphere; they introduce the subordinate clauses that we are going to

cultivate. Indeed you cannot teach them apart from their clauses. And subordinate clauses are the peak of grammar. They are "a group of words, containing a subject and verb, that is used like a single word in the sentence." This definition is the most useful one in grammar and will bear endless repetition. Intelligent boys, trained for three years in the grammar of Latin and English, will lazily call any group of words a clause if they are not held severely to the definition. Such a group of words must be used as either a noun or an adjective or an adverb; only by its use can we know whether it is a noun or an adjective or an adverb clause.

I am using "clause" as I often do in class, to mean subordinate clause. This is a handy abbreviation, but must be employed with caution and with the understanding that a principal clause is an entirely different thing and must always be distinctly named as a "main" or "independent" clause.

Now a class is ready to analyze sentences as simple, complex, or compound and to understand all the ways of varying sentences.

Section C is only a bare outline of an order of topics. I have never followed exactly the same order any two years, and neither should you; for we must meet the emergencies that arise and be prepared to shift position at any time. But I never depart far from this general plan. The teaching of any class cannot proceed smoothly and directly, from one step to the next, but is always a process of going forward for a preliminary survey, of returning to compare the new topic with an old one, of *discriminating* between the two, of moving ahead to another new field, of returning to *discriminate*. There is no place where any territory can be conquered by itself; mastery of any subject is the ability to distinguish among all subjects.

D. Tactics in Each Topic

This section is for reference when any bit of it is wanted; it is not for consecutive reading. Teachers who think it looks like a lot of technical details should never consult it. Teachers who find it incomplete must realize that a full account of tactics would fill a book. This section is not a systematic treatise on the teaching of all constructions. I attempt no more than to speak of certain points that were most troublesome to me in my own years of wandering for solutions, that are rather too petty for Section C, and that teachers ask about anxiously.

1. The sentence-error. Most of the topics in Sections C and D have a direct bearing on the teaching of what a sentence is, so that it might be well to give at this point a scheme of the sentence-errors. But a more natural place is under punctuation, Chapter VIII, Section F, page 233.

2. "What part of speech is this word?" Your pupils will perpetually be asking what part of speech a given word is in itself, apart from any construction in a sentence; perhaps your text will encourage them in this wrong attitude; and perhaps you yourself do not yet realize how wrong the attitude is. So there will be no harm in saying for the third time that grammar is better taught if we never use any such expression as "*Like* is an adjective that is used as a preposition." Most of the words listed in grammars as prepositions are often used as adverbs. To say that *good* is an adjective used like a noun or that *each* is an adjective used like a pronoun implies an untruth that will undo much of your efforts to teach syntax. The truth needed in school is that no word is, in itself, any part of speech.

3. Section D is not concerned with scholarship. You will find that some people are not able to distinguish between the needs of logical scholarship and the needs of pedagogy. To

a scholar the advice in Section D might sound narrow, dogmatic, partial, ignorant. But the advice here is not about the grammar of a scholarly treatise. It is aimed at making the way easy for pupils up to the point where they can begin to have a slight understanding of more general truths. The way to impart the beginnings of knowledge is not to use philosophy, but to contrive a series of such concrete aids as pupils can grasp. The first steps in pedagogy differ from general truths as a scaffold differs from a building. Forget the grandly general. Attend to the boys and girls.

Paragraphs 4-11 are about verbs.

4. Nothing but the verb. The philosophic grammarian may be quite right when he says that *at* is an inseparable part of the verb in "they laughed at us" and "we were laughed at," or he may be wrong. If I should discuss this question in class, fearing to be dogmatic if I taught one view only, I should not confer any knowledge upon nine-tenths of the class. The result of my broad-mindedness would, in actual practice, make students reason thus: "Since *at* is inseparable, any similar preposition is inseparable; therefore the following are verbs; *went to, walked along, stepped aboard.* Therefore any preposition or adverb may be part of the verb, and in the following sentences there are active verbs which have direct objects:

1. I sat among the ferns.
2. I waited for an hour.

Therefore verbs are seldom modified by anything that follows them, but practically always take objects. I am so glad that I am free to say 'object of' as much as I please." The reasoning is irrefutable; if you once admit that *laughed at* is a verb, you may as well quit trying to teach children what a verb is. For you must not play fast and loose with them, saying that *trembled at* is not a verb, while *looked at* is. The sympathetic

teacher will not rig up any such distrusts. He will maintain, what is always logical and consistent, that no preposition or adverb or adjective is ever part of the verb. The explanation of such passive verbs combined with prepositions as *was laughed at* is given in paragraph 23 (*e*), page 194, of this section.

5. Verbs are not transitive or intransitive. Whitney says that any transitive verb may be used intransitively, and it is almost true that any intransitive verb may be used transitively. There are probably not ten verbs in the language which are, in themselves, one kind or the other. I have never seen a grammar that recognizes this fact. In a high-class modern grammar I read that "roared what?" would be an absurdity and that therefore *roar* is an intransitive verb; yet your dictionary will show that it has a transitive use, as in "roar these accusations forth." You cannot conceive how *proceed* could ever be transitive, but the *Oxford Dictionary* will show you how it was so used for centuries. In a newspaper I have recently seen "election news soars prices." If you think that is ignorant journalese, listen to a few transitive uses from *Endymion:*

trembling its eyes
traveling my eye
stare them from me
peeps its crystal eye
I'd bubble up the water
cowering their brushes
which myriads of bees buzz from their honeyed wings
and Aethon snort his morning gold
sad zephyr droops the clouds
or twinkle me to pleasure

I always conceded that *lie* is an intransitive verb until I saw in *Endymion* "the arms so idly lain amongst them" and consulted the *Oxford Dictionary*, which tells about the transitive use of *lie*. Calling a verb transitive or intransitive is an imitation of Latin grammar. The *Oxford* does not say that any verb is transitive or intransitive; it reports the

two kinds of uses, and in a few cases shows that only intransitive uses are found. The most notable case is *be*.

6. Voice. If you accept the idea in the preceding paragraph, you will have to throw overboard the definition that appears in your grammar: "A transitive verb is one that requires an object to complete its meaning." Instead of starting with the illusion that a verb is in itself transitive, and that you are to find which voice it is in, you will have to examine each verb that is encountered to find out whether, in this particular clause, it is transitive or intransitive. The order of questions to put to any verb is this: "(1) Have you an object? If so, you are transitive active. (2) If you have no object, is your subject acted on? If so, you are transitive passive. If the answer to both questions is no, you are used intransitively." Remember that you are battling against the "objectivitis" described in paragraph 13 of this section and that you must help students by not associating an object with the idea of "transitive." There is always an object with an active voice, but never an object with a passive voice. (For the one apparent exception see paragraph 15, page 189.) You must pronounce a formal anathema against the notion, which everyone in your class holds firmly, that "a transitive verb takes an object." I never use "active voice" of intransitive verbs, but say that an intransitive verb has no voice. This method avoids two causes of confusion and is warranted as a matter of scholarship.

7. Complete and incomplete verbs. I have never seen any virtue in describing the intransitive uses of verbs by such terms as "complete or incomplete predication," "linking," "copulative." The distinction depends on whether there is a predicate after the verb ("He is eager") or no predicate ("He is not here"). This is a subtlety, and it fosters the notion that verbs may be, in themselves, one kind or the other. Our duty is to kill that notion.

8. Complements. The same reason holds against using the term "complement," which puts together the objects and the predicate nominatives that we ought always to keep asunder.

9. Mood. Unless my principal or some state examining board obliged me to teach mood, I should never take up the subject in school. A statement or question of fact is indicative, and a command is imperative; those two moods English really has. And there are remnants of an undoubted subjunctive mood in a few formal or archaic uses like "if it were," "may it be," "though he have." These are real variations in form to show that the verbs express a mere mode of thought. Beyond this there is only a welter of subtleties, a flux of contradictory opinion. If left to your own devices, have nothing to do with anything but the few realities. If you are required to teach subjunctives, stick to one simple formula: Does it clearly indicate a mere condition of thought? Many cases are debatable; there are fewer subjunctives than you may suppose. Probably the following are indicative: "I could have shot it with perfect ease" (=the fact is that I had power to), "I may be wrong about this" (=the fact is that there is such a possibility), "Perhaps you would like to stay" (=the fact perhaps really is that). The following would usually be called subjunctive, because they clearly show, or the context shows, that the verb is not indicating a fact: "If only I could have shot it," "I might have gone to bed sooner," "Wouldn't he have enjoyed that!" Few will ever object to your method if you limit subjunctives to: (1) real subjunctive by its form, (2) mere prayerful hope or exhortation that does not sound the least like fact, (3) a condition that is clearly a case of speaking about what would be true if the facts were otherwise. I cannot conceive why any teacher should ever need to mention optative or potential moods, for these are mere shades of meaning; they are not changes of form; they are phantoms imported from classical grammar.

10. Regular and irregular conjugations. If you must teach this distinction, attack it thus: Apply the three following tests; if any one fits, the verb is regular; if no one fits, it is irregular. (1) The past tense ends in a *d* or *t* which is not in the present (*made, had, brought*). (2) The principal parts are the same throughout (*hit*). (3) The vowel is merely shortened in the past (*bleed*). The regular and irregular conjugations are often called "the old and the new." There is one slight application of this subject which sometimes livens up a recitation: most people nowadays have very strong feelings against the regular conjugation, preferring preterits and past participles like *wove, dove, gotten, swollen,* and even "woken"; yet people who love *gotten* do not seem to like *lain.*

11. The extra "have." I had taught almost a year when I discovered with a start that I could not argue surely about "if I'd have known." The false pluperfect is extremely common even in the speech of college graduates and is seldom listed among vulgarisms. No proper verb phrase can contain "had have."

Paragraphs 12-18 are about some constructions of nouns.

12. Subject of the verb. We adults cannot conceive how hard it is for the average student to distinguish between subject, predicate nominative, and object. It is not uncommon to find bright students, in a third year of review, thinking that *windows* is the object in "up flew the windows." Nothing but the "who or what?" question will prevent the *Royal George* from being the object of *down sank,* or *sparrows* from being the object of *there are three.* When Albert has asked and answered it fifty times, he may begin to have a slight twinge of grammatical conscience about "there was two of us." But don't expect that these very delicate effects will ever take the place of saying and saying and saying "there are." When Alfred has proved a hundred times that nouns like *Barbara Frietchie* are not the objects of verbs like

sprang, a useful conception may begin to grow in his mind: "I might put a subject after a verb in my own composition."

13. "Objectivitis." Few students are willing to concede that a noun after a verb is a predicate nominative. All students will gladly concede that anything whatever after a verb is an object, and most of them will not abandon their preference until they are severely dealt with. The most literate young mind I ever tried to instruct—it read Chaucer late at night and it wrote masterful themes—could not be securely taught in a whole year of grammar drill the difference between a direct object and a nominative after *to be.* I shouted, "You cannot have an object of *is*," and whispered dramatically, "There is no such thing as an object of *was.*" Even dull boys in the class would grin with anticipatory pleasure if this lad was called on to give the construction of the noun in "This might have been a palace." To the end he never really conceded that the nouns after *became* and *had been called* were not objects. This boy's weakness can hardly be innate, implanted when Adam fell. It must be that all grade teachers are in a conspiracy to have pupils say "object of." No terms could be hyperbolical enough to overstate the depth of devotion that students feel for "object of." The Hydra was anemic compared to this deathless "object of." The use of "objectivitis" is somewhat helpful. Condole with Margery because she has this dreaded disease which robs her of all power to reason and produces a madness in which everything appears to be an "object of."

14. Certain objective constructions. (*a*) For all our jibing at children, we must remember that the distinction between a predicate nominative and an object is not always easy. Can you prove exactly why *goddess* is a predicate nominative in one of the following sentences and an object in the other? "She resembles a goddess." "She seems a goddess." In "It cost a dollar" can you prove that *dollar* is adverbial, showing

how much it cost? If I call *dollar* an object, I have good authority on my side.

(*b*) The handy formula for an indirect object is this: It shows, without any understood preposition, to or for whom the action was done; it always occurs with a direct object; it never answers the question "What?" when it is applied to the verb. In "Tell me a story" what are you to tell? To or for whom are you to tell it?

(*c*) An objective predicate is a kind of "predicate to the object." Just as a predicate nominative explains the subject and means the same thing as the subject, so an objective predicate explains an object: "Mother calls me *Will;* it makes me *glad.*" Adjectives are frequent as objective predicates.

(*d*) Sometimes, as we have seen, an adverbial objective is indistinguishable from a direct object. There are cases, like "run a mile," in which no argument is clean-cut; all I can do is to admit that I can hardly prove my case. I say, "He did not 'run anything' in the sense that he measured a mile or bought a mile of wire or dreaded the mile of dark road. Mile only tells how far."

(*e*) "The subject of an infinitive" is a Roman way of talking that I will not allow in an English class. It is a confusing way of talking, because "subject" ought to be associated with a nominative case and with verbs. It is confusing because we have to teach that infinitives are not verbs. There is no proof that in an English construction like "we want you to come" there is any subject of *to come.* Whitney was doubtless right when he argued that *you* is an object of *want.*

15. Retained object. For myself I rejoice in the intellectual generosity with which I concede that a passive verb may have an object: "I was awarded second prize." And in private talk with Quintilian Gildersleeve I show my catholic openness of mind. But since I wish to keep all the John Browns from stumbling, I admit no such impediment to a road that is full

of trouble anyway. I must make the path as easy as possible. So I stoutly maintain our standing rule that a passive can never have an object, and I say that *prize* is "retained" in a freakish way when the change is made from the active form. Incidentally, this explanation is much more common in grammars than the admission that a passive may have an object.

16. Appositives. Appositives will remain a lifeless subject for you until you learn in how many ways they are useful for improving style. Here, perhaps more than in any other part of the program, is an opportunity to make direct application of grammar to composition during a grammar recitation. In addition to nouns, the verbals, phrases, noun clauses, and sometimes pronouns, there are several kinds of adjective modifiers which may be used to good effect in "an appositive position." These usually come after the modifying word and are set off by commas or dashes. Appositives and appositive modifiers used after a dash, or set off by two dashes, are very much in favor nowadays among good journalistic writers. In school the knowledge of dashed-off appositives is one of the best ways of doing away with the half-sentence fault. A good school formula for approaching appositives is this: They are placed—"adponoed"—alongside of the nouns or pronouns to which they belong. The standard rule that "an appositive must agree in number" is not always observed in literature.

17. A queer possessive. It is regular idiom to say "this habit of yours" or "that whim of my father's," using a possessive as the object of a preposition. This is an unco construction. Acquire merit with the class by confessing that it is too much for you, but that here it is and that the possessives do not modify any conceivable noun understood.

18. Two nominative constructions. (*a*) We say that a noun used for address is nominative because in Old English it was

nominative. We could tell nothing about it today; and the same is true of a noun used for exclamation.

(*b*) We can tell by the way we use personal pronouns that an absolute construction in English is nominative: "he being undecided." Students are rather fond of absolutes, and will grow fonder if given the least encouragement. They should rather be discouraged, for an absolute is difficult to manage, is apt to be weak, and may sound stiff. Especially should the absolute with personal pronouns be frowned upon ("she having decided in her own mind"); there is no need of *she;* the participle could modify the antecedent of *she.* The description of an absolute, for introducing the subject to a class, is this: It consists of a noun modified by a participle, set loosely in the sentence, absolved from having any regular construction, but showing the time or circumstance or reason in an indefinite way. The participle is sometimes omitted: "He watched me furtively, an ugly look [being] in his eye." (For this sort of "understanding words" see paragraph 41 of this section, page 209.) Though grammarians all speak of an absolute as not being a modifier, it usually is a modifier of a verb, showing in what manner or at what time or why.

19. The independent pronouns. (*a*) In one way the classification of pronouns is of great moment in the teaching of composition: we care to distinguish between the relatives and all the others. Relatives form subordinate modifying clauses; all the others form independent clauses. The most necessary and elementary conception for a knowledge of sentences is that some words are "independent and must have periods or semicolons before them." The personal, demonstrative, and indefinite pronouns are independent in this sense.

(*b*) Also important, though in a much lower degree, is the ready knowledge of antecedents, so that a student may always feel responsible in his composition for using unambiguous pronouns. A conscience for the antecedent of *it* is prob-

ably a hundred times more useful than for antecedents of all the other pronouns together; the unrelated *it* is a theme-reader's bane. In fact it is the bane of all of us; last week I was convicted of using an *it* to refer to a plural noun.

20. The constructions of "it." The three constructions of *it*, which may be made a mess of technicalities, are useful for the ready knowledge of antecedents. First is the ordinary personal use, with a definite antecedent.

Second is the expletive use, as a kind of "dummy subject," with the real subject after the verb: "It is impossible to stop." So in "How far is it to Babylon?" the construction can be explained as "To Babylon [it] is how far?" But in other sentences, which seem parallel in syntax, the word after the verb is not a subject, and *it* cannot be explained as expletive: "It is the next two problems that bother me; it is they." The grammarians have never settled upon any consistent scheme of explaining these; so we mustn't be anxious about them in our elementary work. (See the next paragraph.) Skip the few bothersome cases that may arise, or amuse the class by saying that the grammarians are stumped.

The third construction is impersonal; there is no conceivable antecedent nor any real subject on the other side of the verb: "It looks like rain." "It is Sunday." "It is a matter of minutes." "Is it well with your soul?" "In the lesson it says." (I abominate that school idiom, "it says," but eminent men are heard to use it.) There may also be impersonal objects: "to fight it out," "to lord it." Probably every *it* that has no definite antecedent and that is not clearly an expletive can be explained as impersonal.

21. Are possessives adjectives? Since a possessive noun or pronoun qualifies a noun, I should like to call it an adjective. Teachers of French and Latin beg me to call it an adjective, and I should like to oblige them. To call it an adjective would be a strong item in my program of "what do words

do?" So you can see that only some very strong reason has made me decide to call a possessive a noun or pronoun in the possessive case. Suppose that I said *boy's* is an adjective. Then in "the bad boy's diary" I have the adjective *bad* modifying the adjective *boy's*—and that contradicts a whole section of my program. Since that won't do, and since other teachers of language don't want me to call *boy's* an adjective, I call *boy's* a noun. Now suppose that I call *his* an adjective. I am then setting up a most mysterious difference between nouns and pronouns: a possessive noun is a noun, but a possessive pronoun is an adjective. I am afraid of causing confusion with such a mystery, especially since I don't know any good logic for defending it. So I call every possessive a noun or a pronoun in the possessive case. There is the evidence. Figure out your own choice.

22. Adjectives. (*a*) It is useful to show students that adjectives modify in four different positions: the ordinary position just before the noun ("attributive"), the appositive position (sometimes before the noun, as in "Unconscious of his danger, Booth walked on"), the predicate position ("The milk was sour"), the objective predicate position ("It made me happy").

(*b*) Don't teach, as the grammars imply, that *feel, smell, taste,* etc., always take predicate adjectives. A person can feel warily, or smell hesitatingly, or taste gingerly.

(*c*) Are you one of the ninety-nine per cent of teachers who feel no desire to put a hyphen in a compound adjective? Don't you think you ought to set a good example and care about the hyphen in *three-acre lot, two-family house, hard-luck story?* Somehow I always feel that a boy is better educated when he is trained to put hyphens in compound adjectives.

23. Prepositions. (*a*) In previous sections you have seen why I regard prepositions as extremely useful. My estimate of them has risen steadily and is still rising.

(*b*) One application of them for teaching correct speech is in dealing with the word *like*. I have never found any way to expound *like* except to teach it as a preposition. If a class is familiar with prepositions, if I say that *like* in modern English always has an object and forms a phrase, I show some light. A good form of taboo is "Don't join a verb with *like* ('It looks like it might rain'); use it as a preposition ('It looks like rain')."

(*c*) There are a few cases of a pair of words that may be said to act together as one preposition, called a compound preposition, like *according to* and *instead of*. But even these are dubious; I think we make trouble if we try to extend the list; and I am sure that we hinder progress if we extend it to any three-word combination like *in accordance with*. In all such cases there are two phrases; *accordance* is the object of *in* and is modified by a *with* phrase.

(*d*) Many participles, like *according* and *notwithstanding*, have become pure prepositions. In the case of *considering* we can see a word which is frequently a participle ("Hal, not considering," etc.) and is frequently a mere preposition ("Considering his age, his record is remarkable"). From this case of *considering* you may go all the way through participles loosely used (like the scholarly jargon of "Coming now to the third step, it is seen") to the participles that unquestionably dangle ("Looking hard at the tag, a number of fine scratches could be seen").

(*e*) Teachers have often asked me despairingly, "What in the world is *for* in 'something that had not been looked for'?" The *for* seems not to be a preposition, since it has no object. It is said to be "retained" when the active construction ("that we had been looking for") is turned into a passive. It is an anomaly in syntax, like the retained object after a passive. *With* is the preposition most commonly retained, as in "This must be reckoned with."

(*f*) There is an ancient and deathless superstition that a preposition should never be placed at the end of a sentence. This dogma I have tracked as far back as Hugh Blair's *Rhetoric* of 1848, which says that "we should always avoid concluding with any of such particles as *of, to, from, with, by.*" Yet in this very book Blair wrote sentences that conclude thus: "than what we are accustomed to," "is to be carefully attended to," "which men had any occasion to take notice of," "the subject that is to be treated of." His sentences are proper; his rule is a sham. Of course such a position may be clumsy ("What do you bring such a book to read to me out of for?"), or it may be vulgar ("Where was I at?"). But all makers of literature have closed sentences with prepositions, especially in the case of questions that begin with *what* or in relative clauses ("Who redeems nature from the general curse which twain have brought her to").

24. Explaining adverbs. Three generations of grammarians have hardly succeeded in winning their way to a knowledge of adverbs. Each decade has conceded more importance to them and has extended their territory. Nowadays we are prone to call anything an adverb that cannot be otherwise explained, like expletive *there, yes* and *no,* and some interrogative words. Adverbs modify in such varied ways, and sometimes pile up so thick in one short sentence, that we must not expect students to detect them all or to make headway rapidly. Some adverbs, the "modals" like *probably* and *indeed,* modify in a very vague way. It is easier for students to stick to the explanation that they modify verbs than to say that they modify a whole statement, for that sort of modifying has no parallel; they modify the stating part of a sentence, the verb.

25. Applying adverbs. The "independence" of adverbs is even more important for sentence sense than that of pronouns. Adverbs do not join clauses, but introduce inde-

pendent statements that require semicolons or periods. When I explained this matter nine years ago, I felt very lonesome, because the dictionaries give small warrant for the classification I proposed, and I was therefore considered a dogmatic fellow. In 1925 I have so much company in this classification that I feel crowded.

It is not a matter of dogmatizing or of holding any grammatical theory. I doubt whether any sort of theory about grammar can lodge in my prosy mind. It is a matter of lighting up the road, so that boys and girls may see their way to a certain great fact which society demands they should know: Some connectives form independent statements. A rhetorician may lump adverbs and conjunctions all together as "connectives" and be quite correct in so doing; for he is talking about *meanings* of words as thought-hooks. We have no quarrel with him. But we, teaching fundamentals, are concerned with their *functions as parts of syntax*. It may be right for a dictionary to say that *nevertheless* is a conjunction in such a parenthetical use as "may, nevertheless, not be true," though I fail to see why it is right; it may be all very well for the same dictionary to say that *however* is both a conjunction and an adverb, and that *indeed* is only an adverb—though these nuances of definition are far beyond me. They have nothing to do with pedagogy. American children almost always use these connectives for beginning an added statement, one that is grammatically independent, one of that sort before which a dictionary always uses a semicolon or a period. It is that usage which we are required to teach. And the handy, economical way to teach is to say that all such connectives, as students use them, are adverbs that begin independent clauses, before which commas are not permissible. On the other hand, we teach that commas are permissible, or mandatory, before conjunctions. Then we make progress toward sentence sense.

The following list includes all the independent adverbs that commonly deceive students: *accordingly, also, consequently, finally, hence, however, indeed, nevertheless, now, still, then, there, therefore. Then, there,* and *finally* are most common; *however* and *nevertheless* next in frequency; there is some authority for calling *therefore* a conjunction before which a comma is permissible. *So,* in spite of what the dictionaries say, has become an unquestionable conjunction; but many schools help themselves in their warfare against the "so" habit by requiring a semicolon before it. Certain very common connective phrases are independent in the same way: *at last, at least, in fact, in spite of.* An insistence upon the "independence" of adverbs and adverb phrases is essential to developing a real sentence sense.

26. Relative pronouns. (*a*) Relatives cannot be taught apart from the whole subject of dependent clauses, discussed in paragraphs 33-39. This paragraph deals merely with the one topic of the constructions of relatives. You will moil in vain during the opening days with relatives unless you follow the plan of "picking out the relative clause." "What is the clause?" must be the unfailing question. Consider "He who hesitates is lost." The *he* and the *who* are forever going to be entangled until the pupil learns to "take that clause out of the sentence," and to put it one side, like a dissected organ, and then—never till then—to examine its functions. At first your class will dig out "who hesitates is" and hold it up, all dripping, for scrutiny. Insist that we must have only one leg—not a leg+half a body—which is, being interpreted, one subject and one verb, with their modifiers. (Or at first you may practice on bare subject and verb.)

(*b*) When this dissection can be performed, then you may unfold the precious truth that the construction of a relative is always found *in its clause,* never is mixed in the least with any shred of the sentence outside that clause. After driving

this home you may cautiously take the next step: A relative's gender, person, and number are always found entirely *outside* of the clause—i. e., they depend on the antecedent.

(*c*) A student can decide whether *that* is a relative by finding out whether it makes sense to substitute *who* or *which*. So far as I know, it is never safe to trust him to decide in any other way.

(*d*) Relatives always seem to a class to be in apposition with the antecedents. The answer is that they are not "put alongside of in the same construction," but are subjects or objects, are not in any sense appositives.

(*e*) Relatives are often omitted when they are objects, as in "the thing ( ) I like"; and rarely when they are subjects, as in "the money ( ) there is in the treasury."

(*f*) *Who*, *which*, and *that* are the real relatives, forming adjective clauses; *what* is of a very different sort, always forming noun clauses and never having any antecedent. For many years I followed the old formula of "Let *what* equal *that which*, and then parse the *which*"; but I feel sure this is wrong practice, for it makes another piece of syntax and then reasons about the make-believe.

27. Verbals. The three kinds of verbals are not called parts of speech in the grammars, but are classified as "parts of the verb." You will make life easier and more profitable for students if you teach noun verbals and adjective verbals as distinct kinds of words, as words that decidedly are not verbs. A good school definition is "words that come from verbs and that are used like nouns or adjectives." Their constructions are always to be explained as those of nouns or adjectives. (For an adverbial construction see paragraph 29, (*b*), page 201. After this idea of construction has been established, we add the idea that verbals are somewhat like verbs, for they may be modified by adverbs and may have a predicate nominative or any kind of object.

Don't start out with both sides of verbals; begin with one side, and later show the other side. If we worry about logical consistency, we can make verbals a very mystifying subject; but youth will not worry about logic. We can glide easily over trouble by simply saying, as an added thought about verbals, "And also they are somewhat like verbs, because," etc. In the first phase we see how naturally verbals may be modified by adjectives; in the second phase there is no difficulty about seeing how naturally verbals may be modified by adverbs and may take objects. Present these two separate facts; don't scramble them in a philological discussion. If you should study the treatments of verbals in ten grammars, your head would whirl with the conflicting logicalities that afflict deep reasoners. If you keep your mind on Elsa and Roger, you will easily escape vertigo.

28. Gerunds. A fair example of the profound worriments of grammarians is this rather common analysis: "If the verbal element predominates in an *ing* substantive which originated in a verb, it is to be called a noun." This is sheer metaphysic—not only for children, but for us teachers. It argues that in "Reading, writing, and arithmetic are the three r's" *reading* is a pure noun. Now, starting with that use of *reading*, analyze the following series and see at what point the verbal element enters sufficiently to predominate: (1) reading maketh a full man, (2) reading may be either silent or oral, (3) silent reading is more useful, (4) reading in silence is less dramatic, (5) reading silently without lip motion is difficult for many pupils. Your analysis is a delicate and debatable process of trying to detect the unmeasurable shades of meaning which may vary with the context or even with a speaker's emphasis. You and I may reason about the meanings and come to some agreement, but we can never fix any demarcation of function, never derive any formula that will satisfy the next pair

of teachers. Not even Whitney could tell where the line is to be drawn, for he says, "The uses of the gerund shade off into those of a noun, and it is not possible to draw a line sharply between its values as one thing and as the other." Much less is it possible to frame a definition that will accomplish anything but mind-ache in a grammar class.

If I want to show young people about their mother-tongue, I must stick to syntax, to function, and must say, "If any *ing* word that comes from a verb is used like a noun, it is a gerund." Of course you may be horrified at that and exclaim, "Why, but *clothing* and *paling* are obviously not gerunds; they are pure nouns." You are right. There are rare cases in which a student would violate a strict dictionary sense of meanings. But nine hundred ninety-seven times out of a thousand he will be right by our inaccurate formula, and by it he will learn grammar and learn to respect the teaching of grammar. If Bob ever happens to notice that *clothing* comes from a verb, and so calls it a gerund, I shall be rejoiced and shall congratulate him on a recitation that is beneficial to him and to us. His discovery will enlighten and enliven the recitation on gerunds.

29. Participles. (*a*) So, by the same token, you will never try to distinguish between a participle and a participle that has become a pure adjective, because the distinction is an intellectual impossibility. Neither will you try to distinguish between a participle used as a predicate adjective ("She was perfectly charming") and a participle used as part of a verb phrase ("She was charming the boa constrictor"). We adults who understand advanced grammar can usually agree on the distinction, but by no means always. The only way to teach beginners is by this formula: Call the *ing* word a part of the verb phrase if it makes any kind of sense that way. There is seldom

any need of thrashing out the refinement or of spending time with it. Let students take their choice, but tell them what the grammarians would think.

(*b*) The great business in teaching participles is to explain them as always modifiers of nouns or pronouns. If a student says that *trotting* in "He went trotting along the sidewalk" is a modifier of *went*, this is a notion that has reality in it; it is not to be condemned unless it conflicts with a standing, invariable ruling that participles never modify verbs. The word really does convey the impression that he went "in a trotting fashion"; it may truly be called adverbial. But we get a clearer, more consistent outline of syntax if we insist that participles are always used like adjectives, and that hence *trotting* is like a predicate adjective after *went*.

30. Infinitives as modifiers. Until you have been a textbook-maker for eight years you will not credit the heated feelings that some people have about a method of teaching infinitives. There are only three possible ways of dealing with infinitives: (1) to let them alone, (2) to say that they are sometimes modifiers, (3) to say that they are always like nouns. You are not interested in the first way, else you would not be reading paragraphs 30-32. In this paragraph I will consider the second way. It is perfectly correct; it is the way suggested in numerous grammars; it has been used by many experienced teachers. Obviously infinitives are modifiers. In "he looked to see" and "an ax to grind" we have infinitives that modify the verb *looked* and the noun *ax*. Students can learn this analysis. It has the merits of brevity and truth. What more could be desired?

31. Infinitives as always like nouns. In my classes I want two more merits—consistency and ease. The method of saying that some infinitives are modifiers knocks con-

sistency to smithereens. For every other part of speech or verbal we have a simple definition that we can set up at the outset as an unfailing guide: a noun or an adjective or a gerund or a participle has one invariable function. So I wish to make no exception when I take up infinitives. But the method of modifiers obliges me to say that "an infinitive is a queer thing which is sometimes used like a noun, sometimes like an adjective, and sometimes like an adverb." If that three-headed definition, so opposed in spirit to every other definition that we use, has no terrors for you, skip the next paragraph. It contains nothing for you.

If, like me, you want consistency, adopt the method of starting with the plain, truthful, easy definition that "an infinitive is a simple form of a verb, used like a noun." In so doing you will be on the side of all the dictionaries, all such authoritative grammarians as Mätzner and Whitney and Sweet and Jespersen, most of the general treatises on language like Greenough and Kittredge's *Words and Their Ways.* (The *Oxford Dictionary* defines an infinitive as "a substantive with certain verbal functions." Whitney says, "The infinitive is a verbal noun, and all its constructions are to be explained as such." And so on, and so on.) Then when you come to "an ax to grind," you please the class by an invitation to say "object of." For the infinitive is *grind;* it is the object of *to;* and the phrase modifies. It is the historical fact that the modifying infinitive was originally a prepositional phrase that was felt to be prepositional, because the object of *to* was not the plain infinitive, *grindan,* but was unmistakably in the dative case, *grindanne.*

Ancient English means nothing to me in a twentieth-century class; I would forget it or deny it if I could make grammar easier. But the fact in my own experience is that

eighth-grade pupils like "object of *to*" and thrive on it. In fact every class I ever taught has grown too fond of it and has had to be curbed. If I maintain throughout my work with infinitives that they are always like nouns, I have a uniform scheme of all syntax from beginning to end. Perhaps you will not find it so. Experiment. Bear in mind this fact: the method with which you are familiar will seem easier to you; try to find out what is easier for the class. I know of one man who had used the modifier method for nineteen years and thoroughly disliked the always-noun method, but a year of experiment converted him. I know another who had used the always-noun method for twelve years; he experimented with the modifier method; he reported: "Never again! My class is all balled up." You never can tell till you try.

32. Bits about infinitives. (*a*) Infinitives are rather laughed at by people whose notions are derived from the pale smallness of the Latin infinitive. But our English infinitives are very numerous, very strong, very various, interesting, useful in composition.

(*b*) About half of the infinitives in ordinary prose are modifiers.

(*c*) Don't use such descriptions of infinitive functions as "complementary," because that includes both predicate nominative and object and I know not what else. It means nothing. Don't use "purpose" as a description of function, for that is a matter of meaning. Don't use any new term to explain infinitives. Use the terms that show how infinitives have the constructions of nouns (or of adjectives and adverbs) that have already been studied.

(*d*) Don't confound a class by talking of a "subject of an infinitive" or about an "infinitive clause."

(*e*) In "For him to act so was wrong" we may say that *to act* is the subject and that *for him* modifies the verb:

"To act so was (for him) wrong." This use of the infinitive with *for* is never an ornament to a theme and, despite its good standing in literature, had better be discouraged in school.

33. Subordinate clauses are difficult. We can hardly conceive how esoteric subordinate clauses seem to Jack and May. We must try to conceive. Students are not stupid; some of them are brighter than we. They feel, when fronting subordinate clauses for the first time, as I should if I were told to comply quickly and accurately with the following requirement in an intelligence test: "Form a congeries of postulates so arranged that number two, in which number one is involved in a limiting capacity, shall be involved in a limiting capacity in number three, which is to be uninvolved." That philosophical verbiage may feebly illustrate the lack of appeal which "relative clause" makes to the average fourteen-year-old student.

34. Teach relative clauses graphically. If we can keep in mind how abstruse a subject clauses are when presented formally, we shall make every effort for concreteness, for illustration, for vividness. If we ourselves appreciate how useful clauses are in composition, especially for the average student, we shall seek every way to make them alive and to study them as very practical, everyday things. Begin with the simplest kind, the relative clauses. Illustrate them by short sentences in which there is only one relative. Show that a relative clause is weak, small, dependent, of a lower rank; all it can do is to attach itself to some one noun or pronoun as a mere adjective. You prepare for all subordinate clauses by showing that a relative clause is "like a single word." Every subordinate clause is used like a single adjective or a single adverb or a single noun. A relative clause merely "hangs down from" its antecedent. I remember an epoch that began in my

life as I rushed to the board in a desperate mood, wrote in huge letters "THE MAN HAS GONE," and then, inside a loop connected to *man*, wrote in small letters "*who was here.*" There was a graphic exhibit of the bigness and independence of the main clause, and the small, adjectival bondage of the relative clause. I have used the device ever since.

35. Don't smatter with "descriptive" relatives. It is doubtful whether you should take up, in a grammar class that is merely studying elements of syntax, the difficult question of whether relatives are "limiting" or "descriptive"—that is, whether they are restrictive or non-restrictive in meaning. The distinction can be taught rather thoroughly in a ninth-grade class if the necessary approach has been carefully planned and if you know just how to work; the distinction ought to be taught in every forward ninth-grade class. But it is more than syntax and must be handled as a matter of meaning in composition. This paragraph is a warning against supposing that you are to take up "descriptive" relatives casually some day and round them up in fifteen minutes. The subject is a part, the most difficult part, of punctuation; some schools defer it till the eleventh year. (See page 258, division 5 of the parenthetical uses of commas.)

36. Other adjective clauses. A large majority of adjective clauses are formed with relative pronouns, but adjective clauses are formed by several conjunctions: "the hour when it rose," "the place where we ate," "the time since he died," "the day after they left."

37. The subordinating conjunctions. (*a*) It is worth while to habituate the class to the use of "subordinating," with the emphasis on the *ing;* for this means that the conjunction is doing the subordinating and that the clause is subordinate.

(*b*) On the first day when a conjunction appears for class discussion, show that it is an entirely different animal from a relative pronoun. A relative always has, inside its clause, the construction of a noun, but a conjunction has no construction; it is a mere coupling. To be sure, one grammar says that it modifies in the main clause, and another grammar says that it modifies in its own clause; but in my classes it is never allowed to modify anything. It is only a conjoining word. Its function is to hook its clause to some one word in the main clause. Don't think that I am dogmatic or notional when I insist upon "some one word." If you allow children to say "joins the two clauses," you are teaching them nothing; if you require the one word to which a subordinate clause is attached, you are throwing a spot-light on syntax. Subordinating conjunctions join modifying clauses to nouns, forming adjective clauses; or modifying clauses to verbs, forming adverb clauses; or subject or object clauses to verbs, forming noun clauses. These are the usual kinds of dependent clauses.

(*c*) Some subordinate clauses do not contain a conjunction:

1. He said ( ) he would.
2. He was so happy ( ) he cried.
3. I am sorry ( ) you have to go.

(*d*) A few conjunctions are compound: *as if, as though, so that.* If you try to extend this list to include any such combinations as *more than* or *as large as,* you will involve yourself in perplexities. See paragraph 39 (*b*), page 208. Under paragraphs 38 and 39 I will discuss some puzzling kinds of noun clauses and adverb clauses.

38. Certain noun clauses. (*a*) Noun clauses may be in any construction except the following: address, indirect object, objective predicate, adverbial objective, possessive.

And I might manufacture these abnormally. A boy once argued in my class that he found an adverbial objective clause in "It happened the night that you came"; he reasoned that *night* was adverbial, and that therefore a clause which modified it was adverbial. I bowed before his intellectual superiority to me, and the class sat in awed silence.

(*b*) Direct quotations are, as a matter of syntax, noun clauses, the objects of the main verbs.

(*c*) A noun clause may be the object of a preposition: "He inquired about what I was doing." In many cases it could be argued that the word joining a modifying clause is a preposition: "I spoke before I thought." Our course in clauses will be much more smooth and straight if we require that such a joining word be called a conjunction whenever possible. The indubitable prepositions are rather rare.

(*d*) In the case of noun clauses used as subject or object it may seem far-fetched to say that the conjunction "joins" the clause to the verb. Don't make a point of this or argue it; admit that "it's about all we can say."

39. Certain adverb clauses. (*a*) *For* and *so* are usually taught as coördinating conjunctions which add a reason or result as an independent proposition. This distinction is such a refinement that Mätzner said he could not follow it. Certainly you and I must not try to abide by it in class. This case shows very prettily how we must never set out with the idea that certain conjunctions are, in and of themselves, coördinating. We should never discuss the status of *for* and *so*, but should inquire whether the clauses seem to modify. *Yet* is always called coördinating, like *but; though* is regularly called subordinating. A very ingenious and convenient solution for these disputed conjunctions has been made by Henry C. Edgar, of the Hotchkiss School: "If the clause could be transposed to the be-

ginning of the sentence, it is subordinate; if not, it is coördinate." As a philosophy of grammar this might not be accepted by the theorizers, but as a school device it is admirable.

(*b*) In the case of all clauses of comparison teach that the clause modifies one word, some preceding adjective or adverb. In "as heavy as I could carry" the *as* clause modifies the first *as;* in "so big that I couldn't lift it" the *that* clause modifies *so;* in "smaller than I could see" the *than* clause modifies *smaller.*

(*c*) Sometimes an adverb or a pronoun in *ever* forms an adverb clause modifying a verb:

1. You must go, however much you hate to.
2. We shall not budge; whoever orders us off.

(*d*) To analyze clauses as of condition, purpose, result, and the like, may be good rhetorical exercise. It is not grammar; for it is not a discussion of function, but of meaning.

40. Coördinating conjunctions. (*a*) Such conjunctions as *and, but, or, yet, either . . . or, not only . . . but also* join two words or two phrases or two subordinate clauses or two coördinate clauses of equal rank. As a subject in grammar they are of microscopic importance compared with the subordinating conjunctions.

(*b*) To begin a sentence with a coördinating conjunction is to announce that the writer is relating the whole thought of his previous sentence to the whole thought of this sentence. Since students often bungle such an undertaking, they are in some schools forbidden to use *and* or *but* at the beginning of a sentence. There is no other reason for an interdict. Every piece of our literature, ancient or modern, furnishes examples of coördinating conjunctions standing first in sentences. Yet there are teachers who,

in spite of a universe of facts, believe that in really pure English no *and* or *but* or *for* ought to be an initial word.

(*c*) In written composition we may improve style by training pupils to use such a conjunction occasionally as the first word of a sentence. A *so* within a written sentence is a pest; a *so* that begins a written sentence may be a goodly adornment. But any *so* in oral composition is baneful, because it stimulates a bad habit.

41. Ellipses. A knowledge of ellipses is necessary before any student can be completely trained to avoid comma sentences, since a subject or a verb, or both subject and verb, may be omitted: "[That is] Very well. What shall we do about it?" In other important ways ellipses bear on composition. Below is a set of examples of all ordinary types of ellipsis, reprinted from page 502 of *Theme-Building;* but this list does not include the various, often inexplicable, omissions (discussed in the textbook) which occur with *as* and *than*—such as "I am as tall as he [is tall]." "He had no more than I [had]."

1. I want the one [that] you have.
2. [The person] Whoever finds may keep.
3. [You] Don't be too sure.
4. [I will say] To put it briefly, [that] we have not the cash.
5. He slouched against a post, a cigarette [being] in his mouth.
6. I spent a week at the Holmeses' [house].
7. Come on if you want to [come].
8. Why do I? [I do so] Because I choose to [do so].
9. [That is] No matter. [There is] No harm done.
10. [Understand that this is] Not that I care a hang.
11. [Say] No more!
12. [What you say is] All right. I agree.
13. While [we were] standing there, we felt the shock.
14. Fellows [who are] not yet of age are barred.
15. [Do they mean] Us! [That is] Impossible!
16. [That is] Just my luck! Now we're done for.

You will find it difficult to explain to a class the two ways of regarding omitted words, which seem contradictory:

(*a*) We must supply ellipses.

(*b*) We must not "understand" words.

Indeed the line between the two commandments is so hard to draw that you had best not try to reason about the general principle before a class. For your own guidance think thus: We must supply words that are necessary to the sense and that are often used in natural idiom; we must not imagine words that are not necessary and that do not produce common idioms when they are thrust into the sentence. Here, as everywhere in the teaching of grammar, you will spoil your own efforts if you dwell on subtleties and generalities. Your aim must always be to learn the concrete program that is most helpful, and to handle each detail of it concretely.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT AND WHY IS PUNCTUATION?

That punctuation is important all agree; but how few comprehend the extent of its importance!

—*Edgar Allan Poe*

Proem to Chapters VIII and IX

In the universe of human prejudice there is no region where fancy reigns so free as in punctuation. People who profess ignorance of all other complicated matters will profess an insight into the nature of commas. Hard-headed people imagine wildly when they discuss dashes. Esthetic people have indulged in rhapsodies about punctuation, and sober editors have denied the truth on which it is based. There seems to be a curse upon the subject, so that no one can remain rational while he is involved in it.

So it is likely that you and I are going to be unreasonable as we journey together through Chapter VIII: I shall probably talk like a fanatic, and you may not be able to open your mind to facts as a dutiful reader should. We must appreciate this funny situation at the outset and try to make the half hour as enjoyable as possible. I shall realize what you are thinking about my idea. Try, on your part, to imagine what I think of yours. Let's smile.

While we are walking along this gentle approach to the craggy subject, permit me to explain that I was once in your present frame of mind. To me, as to you now, punctuation seemed a dreary subject, fit only for compositors

with inky fingers. I was fresh from two years of graduate study of English, perfumed with Chaucer's *verskunst*, steeped in the origin of the novel, intent upon writing a novel, secretly making sonnets. Oh, I know how reluctant you are. Through three years of teaching I still trailed the clouds of academic glory about me, thinking only of that literary heaven which is the home of all English teachers.

In the fourth year of work a Fact came knocking at the door of my palace of dreams: the boys did not know how to indicate, by using the customary marks, where their sentences ended or what the parts of sentences meant. So I was obliged to sally out into the garish light of common day and attend to this rude Fact. I realized, with a heavy sigh, that I must devote much time, possibly as much as three or four days, to showing boys how to use commas and periods. I did so. Then I went back to my literary slumbers.

Shortly the Fact returned; it came again, and again, and again. I was not allowed to sleep. After two years of continual disturbance I resolved to stay outdoors with the boys. To my amazement I found that I had to do more teaching of punctuation, and ever more. I was driven to it, against my stubborn will. By its means I learned to be useful to average boys. That is why I invite you to examine punctuation.

This way, please.

A. The Land of "Nobody Knows"

You will like the idea in this section. It shows how some fine people think that there are no definite principles of punctuation and that these delicate matters of instinct should not be rudely reduced to a school system. It seems

that a large proportion of American critics of education doubt whether anyone knows anything definite about punctuation, or ought to know. They imply that we should all feel free to guess when it is time to stick in a mark. The following professions of agnosticism were made by men of exceptionally good intellect, all somewhat prominent as editors or educators: "Everyone has to pick up a system for himself"; "I go absolutely by the way it feels"; "I can't argue the questions, but simply know that in my long proof-reading career I have always done thus and so, and am sure I am right"; "no comprehensive code can possibly account for all the subtleties and emphases of the uses of commas"; "no definite rules can be given"; "punctuation comes by nature"; "I strive instinctively to be clear."

Isn't that nice? You can go by the way it feels, and it will come by nature to pupils if you just let them alone. Also I am sure you will enjoy the following bits from a racy article in a pedagogical journal. It presents a really able analysis, founded on actual observation of what authors do, but does not remain on the low level of usage. The author scorns the rhetorics for basing their rules on mere usage, and develops "a real psychology, based on intrinsic character," one that is derived from "natural creative expression." You have never thought of that—have you, now, honestly? It seems that a comma must have an "intrinsic character"—that is, a dot prolonged curvingly downward to a point has an inherent power to suggest something in particular to a reader. So has each of the marks—thus: "Each sign must perform its function by virtue of some immediate suggestive power, or not at all," "marks peculiarly suggestive in form," "the indeterminate curves of the interrogation," "the quick expressiveness of the other signs," "the comma, with its tiny hook leftward,

creates a suspension," "the colon is essentially dramatic in effect, abrupt, definitive, revealing no suggestion of subordination."

You have now glimpsed some of the freedom and beauty of punctuation when rightly conceived: one man sees it innate in his brain; another perceives it inhering in the shapes of the marks. Both thinkers are happy. Nobody knows.

In works of reference you may learn that Aldus Manutius, the founder of the Aldine Press, bestowed the system of punctuation upon a grateful world, that he "primarily developed" or was "a pioneer" or that he "introduced." If we open a volume of facsimiles of medieval printing, we can learn that, before Manutius ever saw a printing-press, perhaps before he had seen a printed book, three Germans produced at Paris a volume whose punctuation looks remarkably modern, with its parentheses, its hyphens, and its commas—to mention only the refinements. In contrast to this a page of an Aldine preface of 1513 is a maze, so thickly is it strewn with commas, so bewildering is the use of the period as both an end stop and an internal point, so curious are the total absence of the colon and the employment of a semicolon as an abbreviation for *ue*. Manutius's page is farther from the customs of our day than the page of Gering, Kranz, and Freiburger of 1471. And you may see, stretching back for centuries before printing was invented, an unbroken line of manuscripts punctuated in the true Aldine way. So nobody knows about the origin of punctuation.

And some people feel that we cannot learn anything about the use of punctuation today. One principal of a school will wish to discharge a teacher who uses no commas at the ends of lines in addressing an envelope, and a secretary of a state board of education will not allow any commas

at all in his printed reports. One man has a religious faith in a semicolon before *namely;* another knows that only a comma is sensible; a third will fight for a dash; a fourth, pitying all the three, uses nothing. Punctuation is nothing but a state of emotion where nobody knows.

Ask four men, eminent in their fields and students of punctuation, why they use a comma before a dash. The first will say, "The dash intensifies the comma"; the second will say, "The comma indicates more power for the dash"; the third will say, "The comma and the dash are doing independent jobs"; the fourth will say, "There must be no comma unless there are two commas and two dashes." And if you ask a fifth man, he will say that all four are ignorant, old-fashioned, self-deceived persons; that there should never under any circumstances be a comma with a dash. Nobody knows.

I think I could find fairly respectable authority for either side of three-fourths of the rules for punctuation. There should be, and also there should not be, a comma after an introductory clause; there must usually be, and there should almost never be, a comma after an introductory phrase; commas to set off quotations are utterly needless and also utterly necessary as a convention; a comma is and is not needed before the conjunction in a compound sentence, before the *and* that joins the last two members of a commaed series, after *of course,* with a noun clause used as subject or object. Some authorities tell us that a comma separates groups of words; others assure us that a comma joins groups of words. Punctuation is a kingdom of misrule, and its national anthem is *Nobody Knows.*

We are all at liberty to use marks any way we like. I don't have to pay any attention to what you think a comma means; you mustn't suppose that I mean what you mean; you must be sensitive to what I mean. Punctuation is

not like the world of affairs, where mechanically-minded people agree that "$" means dollars and all use it slavishly with only that signification. No. In the land of Nobody Knows, as in Wonderland, a comma means what I, in my inner consciousness, wish it to mean.

Isn't it the darlingest place!

B. But Anybody Can See What Punctuation Is

Poe refused to dwell in the Cimmerian twilight of Nobody Knows. He announces in one of the *Marginalia:*

> There seems to exist a vulgar notion that the subject [of punctuation] is one of pure conventionality, and cannot be brought within the limits of intelligible and consistent rule. And yet, if fairly looked in the face, the whole matter is so plain that its rationale may be read as we run. If not anticipated, I shall, hereafter, make an attempt at a magazine paper on *The Philosophy of Point.*

Poe had no private fancy about what a colon "reveals." He knew that there is nothing for a colon to signify except the meaning which custom has put into it. He knew that centuries of usage have given to a colon the meaning of subordination. The world has used this mark as coldbloodedly as it has used any other symbol. For seven hundred years before Gutenberg was born the colon had been used as a divider of small portions of a sentence; it was subordinate to the big commas, which marked the ends of sentences. In modern letters it is used after a vocative, a very subordinate element. In arithmetic it shows a ratio; in music it marks the sections for chanting; in expressing the time of day it may separate hours from minutes. Dr. Johnson thought its use was "not very

exactly fixed, being confounded by most with the semicolon." A colon has no meaning in itself.

No mark can have any meaning in any one person's mind, because "meaning" always involves an agreement between at least two people. If you now suspect that I am going to write a paragraph of talkative psychology, you do me wrong. I am thinking of you when you decide what you are going to tell the Jacks and the Harriets about commas. I am as practical as a yardstick. I have seen so many teachers distracted by false notions of what a comma is that I want you to know, for your peace of mind. When you have the knowledge, you may do what you please with it. Let's start over again.

No mark can have any meaning in any one person's mind, except as a secret code, like the one Pepys used for writing his diary. His private signs were used with the express purpose of *not* conveying a meaning to anyone who came upon his manuscript. If his purpose had been to communicate his thoughts to somebody else, he would have had to draw up a code and to agree with somebody what each symbol represented. That is the fundamental fact about any use of words or signs for communication. A dot followed by a dash cannot have any meaning in the brain of any one telegraph operator, but only in the brain of at least two operators who have agreed that this combination of clicks from a sounder shall stand for the letter *a*. I cannot send any message to you, of any kind whatever, until I have agreed with you what the signs mean. No colon can signify anything whatever in my letter to you unless you and I use the same code for the meanings that we have agreed upon. Unless I am a lunatic, I shall not use a comma to mean fire or heaven or cuttlefish until I have arranged with you which one of the three nouns it represents. No more shall I, unless I lack sense, expect

any reader to understand my "pause" or "emphasis" or "non-similarity of construction" until I know that he is familiar with the code of signals that I use. Do you wonder why I should argue so obvious a truth? Look back into the Land of Nobody Knows and think of some of the creeds: "I go by the way it feels"; "I strive instinctively to be clear." Did you, when you read those ideas, perceive that they are the sheerest nonsense? You can now see, if you agree with the truisms in this paragraph, that I cannot go by the way it feels inside of me or strive to be clear within the limits of my own instincts. There is always another party to clarity: the person who reads my composition. Anybody ought to know that, if he would be clear in his writing, he must go by the way *the other fellow* understands arbitrary symbols and must strive to use marks clearly according to *the reader's* understanding of a code that is published, that is commonly and exactly agreed upon.

Have you any suspicion that I am clubbing a man of straw? Just three days ago I talked with a friend whose intellect is much above the academic average: it is quick; it has detailed knowledge of three languages other than English; it is clever in dialectic; its business is teaching young men to detect false assumptions. To him I put the question, "Why do you tuck commas in front of dashes?" And he expounded to me the form of emphasis which he denoted by his commas. His private reason is not in any treatise on punctuation, nor in the minds of those few men in the United States who are responsible for the comma-dash in office style-books. If my friend's manuscript had been scrutinized by a thousand critical readers chosen at random, it is likely that not one of them would have guessed the meaning that my friend was hopefully wigwagging to them. He was happy in sending by his code, but was indifferent

to the fact that nobody could receive the message. The same forgetfulness of the receivers of punctuational messages is in all the inhabitants of the Land of Nobody Knows. It deludes many brilliant critics who advise teachers of English. It distresses many teachers who are obliged to teach punctuation, but who are uncertain what to teach.

So soon as anyone has seen the primary fact of punctuation—that it is an arbitrary code generally understood—he can easily see what is wrong with the queer theories of Section I. I will briefly explain those illusions in a series of short, numbered paragraphs, not taking space for much arguing of the points, but merely setting down what seems to me the truth. I am not dogmatic. I am saving your time and leaving you at liberty to do your own arguing.

1. The people who think that nobody knows an exact code of punctuation are a minority, and nearly all of them use in their own writing the customary code, which they have absorbed from their reading without formulating it. All the great workaday world of publishers knows of a surety that there is a very precise code. Every good newspaper, every magazine, every editorial department of a book-making establishment adopts for itself a "style-card" to guide its punctuation. These are in substantial agreement. In the *English Journal* for April, 1924, Mrs. D. D. Farrington, of Hunter College, thus sums up a thorough investigation of modern rules: "The simple fact is that today the agreement in working practice is extraordinary. . . . Certainly punctuation is standardized. . . . Let a student once recognize that punctuation is standardized by good usage, and the no-man's-land of writing will be a permanent conquest."

2. The man whose influence has counted most in forming style-cards since 1900 is Theodore L. De Vinne, of the Century Company, the most eminent typographer that has

lived in America. If you ever wish to read a little about the basis of modern ideas of punctuation, consult his *Practice of Typography*.

3. A sensible teacher must adopt one horn of the dilemma: (*a*) she must refuse to teach punctuation because nobody knows anything definite about it, or (*b*) she must teach the code that is generally agreed upon in this generation.

4. A sensible teacher must put away all private emotions, private fancies, private prejudices, because these are not understood by the world; if any student adopted them, he would be sending messages that are mere hieroglyphics.

5. There is no possibility of arguing sensibly *on general principles* about the right or wrong of any rule of punctuation. The only true knowledge of punctuation is found by asking, "What are the facts of usage?"

6. Aldus Manutius did not invent punctuation, any more than Chaucer invented poetry. An encyclopedia will tell you that "Aristophanes of Byzantium invented a system in the third century B. C." In manuscripts for a thousand years thereafter you may see various marks used to separate sentences. Here is a manuscript made in England during the eighth century; commas are used for the ends of sentences. Here is a Greek manuscript made in the Orient during the ninth century; the ends of sentences are marked by periods placed at the top of the line. If you care to follow up the history (nobody has ever written it), you can see sentences separated by colons, by semicolons, by slanting lines, or by periods at the bottom of the line. Punctuation was a slow growth out of a great variety of local customs.

7. Early punctuation was usually and regularly an effort to follow custom, so that readers might know when they had reached the end of a sentence, or of a major element of a sentence. The marks never "joined"; they always were, and still are, marks of division.

8. When an early printer (down to 1500) set up a new press in a city, he made every effort to have his type resemble the letters current in the manuscripts of the region. He was a business man, wishing to please patrons, fearful of offending them by novelties, always imitating what had been customary. He imitated whatever punctuation had been customary in handwriting. Punctuation never has been subjective; it has always been a following of objective custom.

9. Every printer has striven to find out what code of punctuation is most commonly used, most readily understood. The more widely books circulated beyond the towns where they were printed, the more need there was for uniformity over a large area. Since 1700 there have been no great differences in the systems of punctuation used in Europe.

10. You can guess that authors have had very little to do with developing punctuation. Few of them have claimed to be authoritative guides; few of them have had enough influence with publishers to persuade them to deviate far from an office style.

11. No code of punctuation has ever represented the pauses of speech. No publisher could judge pauses, since equally intelligent readers would pause very differently in oral reading, and not one of them could guess at the author's pauses. Sometimes a jury of good oral readers would agree that there ought to be a longer pause where there is no comma than where there is an important comma, or even where there is a period. Even the emotional essayist who felt the inherent quality of colons argued unanswerably that marks do not, and cannot, correspond to pauses. Almost two centuries ago a Londoner named Francillon, a conservative and careful man, reasoned that "the rules of pausing are of no value"; John Wilson (see page 223) announced

the falsity of any reasoning from pauses; an overwhelming majority of authorities has been against the pause myth—time would fail me to quote from Marsh and Bigelow and De Vinne and the Fowlers and Orcutt and Teall and Klein and Manly. No good manual of punctuation issued since 1900 advises any trust in pauses.

12. It is true that "no set of rules can account for all the subtleties that I want to express by punctuation." My emotional state cannot be classified and tagged with rule 47, exception 3, note 2. Punctuation is only a set of mechanical devices for separating elements of sentences in certain conventional ways. An author who goes farther is merely chasing his own fancies round and round in his own brain; a publisher who went farther would be a mystic.

13. It is true that I could quote authority on either side of a large part of the rules for punctuation. It is also true that, with a few slight exceptions, *modern* authority is practically all on one side. A person who is willing to throw away prejudice and weigh evidence will find that almost the whole modern code is precisely agreed upon in the United States and is teachable in schools.

C. What Is Authority?

If you look in the rhetorics with which you are familiar, you will find certain rules that are denied in Chapter IX of this book; whereupon you will quite properly ask, "Why is any book better authority than any other? What is authority, anyway?" The purpose of this section is to answer the question.

I can be more brief and clear if I describe some one concrete case of a disputed rule. A good one is the custom of using a comma before a dash, which many teachers are fond of. If you use this combination in a letter to me and if I

tell you that there is no good warrant for it, you can refer me to Professor Yarvard in his textbook only fifteen years old. This is very real authority; it proves that you and he have a right to indulge yourselves in this custom. But have you a right to teach it to John Doe, aged sixteen? Is the comma-dash a frail antique or a modern reality? When you examine the manuals published since 1900, you do not find it; you cannot see it in the newspapers or magazines that John reads; you can find it in only a small minority of modern books. The comma-dash is not a part of that world in which John is to be voter. There is no authority that is valid for John. We must always distinguish between an authority which excuses our self-indulgence and the authority which is binding custom for John Doe.

Whence came the Yarvard rule authorizing the comma with the dash? From earlier textbooks. Every maker of a set of school rules feels that he must be careful, that he must quote from previous rules, that it is perilous to rely on his observation of the facts of his day. So he copies from recent books, which were copied from somewhat earlier books, which had been copied from still earlier books. If we follow up this cascade, what source do we reach? First we shall come upon Bigelow's manual, a storage reservoir that irrigated all the punctuational fields of the country in the 80's and 90's. Bigelow was editorial proof reader for the Riverside Press, a sort of Archbishop of Commas for his generation, whose influence went everywhere and went deep. Thousands of professors and editors hold today opinions that were first fed by the waters of his dicta. But he was not a source. He gave out no more than he received. The stream runs back to John Wilson's *Treatise.* His second American edition in 1855 he thought "the most complete of any on the subject that he has seen." Not content with having made the best, he continually ampli-

fied, revising and extending his comments, enforcing his precepts with many pages of illustrative sentences, and offering instruction by a great many more pages of unpunctuated sentences. The twentieth edition of the *Treatise*, brought out three years after his death, is the great storehouse which every succeeding text-maker has pillaged without acknowledgment—often, no doubt, plundering at second or third hand, and so not even being aware whence his booty had originally come.

In the days of Wilson it was almost universal custom to use a comma with a dash, and so it was in Bigelow's day. The combination was obsolescent in 1890 and practically dead by 1900. Today it lingers in only two well-known periodicals, the *Atlantic* and the *Century;* and even in these it is always a pair of commas with a pair of dashes. It is curious that a *Century* editor is faithful to an ancient formula which had already become abhorrent to De Vinne in 1890. How, then, can the comma-dash be sensible in a modern school? What authority can raise the dead and require John Doe to associate with it?

We have no right to use precious school time for teaching the vogues of long ago. We must teach modern facts. If you want to know what they are, you can readily find them in two places.

1. The recent manuals. The Mechanics of Writing, by R. W. Pence (1921), is the most careful record of present-day facts that I know, most plainly expressed, with the fullest set of illustrative examples. The leading manual used to be *Manual for Writers*, University of Chicago Press (1913); and perhaps this will again take first place if it is revised. The most authoritative older manual is De Vinne's *Practice of Typography* (1901). A modern English view can be seen in *The King's English*, by H. W. and F. G. Fowler, Oxford, (1918). Other manuals are by F. Horace Teall (1914) and

W. L. Klein (1916). An interesting doctoral dissertation on the subject is George Summey's *Modern Punctuation*, Oxford Press (1919).

2. The periodicals. Even if you believe that the opinions of authors are useful, you cannot learn them except by personal correspondence; for you never can tell to what extent an author's punctuation has been conformed to the office style of his publishers. And it is hard to learn modern usage from volumes of literature, because their style may be somewhat old-fashioned and because an author's taste may have been followed somewhat. A book is likely to be a mosaic of usage. But the good periodicals, especially in their editorial sections, represent what punctuation actually is today. I know how peculiar that idea may seem to you, because eight years ago it seemed startling to me when I went on record with it in an *English Journal* article. But I have heard no protests against it. I cannot find any other source of first-hand information. List all the other possibilities and see which one you would prefer to rely on: your own private emotions about the looks of marks, your reasoning about general principles, your innate instincts, what authors do, what rhetorics say, what is to be seen in books. Think it over.

There are three strong reasons why the *Saturday Evening Post* is the best source of information for school purposes: (*a*) Boys and girls are shocked into a pleasant attention when you tell them that the *Post* is an authority on a school subject. (*b*) The *Post* is scrupulous and intelligent and modern in its punctuation. (*c*) All its matter—stories and funny pages alike—is normalized to one consistent style. Don't trust to any textbook; don't worry about the slight differences in the manuals; see with your own eyes what the periodicals do. (Note, however, that the *Post* style for the conjunction in a compound sentence and for an intro-

ductory clause and for a commaed series is not what is easiest and best for students; nor is it the usage favored by the manuals. See Chapter IX, page 244.)

I have always found that the leaders of moving pictures are an interesting source of evidence. Some of the more artistic reels are wretchedly punctuated; but the majority are now very well done; the Pathé reels are conscientious to a high degree.

D. The Usefulness of Punctuation in School

The objective of this chapter is not a sheaf of rules, even though it may seem to exalt "a precise code" and to concern itself with picayunish details of usage. My aim is very different. I have in mind the fearsome ignorance of students as to what a decent sentence is. All teachers and college instructors testify to it. They are all but helpless before it, because they have so little foundation on which to build. Most of our colleges have to take violent measures to secure some degree of improvement. Why have we done so poorly? Because the textbooks say, "No definite rules can be given"; because those books that do present a fairly consistent code are unemphatic as to what virtues are cardinal, what sins are deadly; because teachers who do not know the facts of punctuation are thus encouraged to avoid the subject; because back of all this charming indifference to "hard-and-fast-rules" lies a most pestilential indifference to the distinction between a comma and a period; and because the anemia of that indifference produces in pupils the extreme of heedlessness and sloth. Whether good usage calls for a comma with *and* is the pettiest thing in the world; whether a group of words demands a period is the most important matter in the whole range of formal education. Until the law for separating sentences is known to be definite, is definitely

and emphatically presented in texts, is a definitely required part of every English teacher's equipment, so long will high-school seniors be hopelessly indefinite as to the distinction between part of a sentence and two sentences.

All too well we can imagine what injudicious persons will do when set to teaching punctuation as "a system precise in every detail." Perhaps we must acknowledge that a large part of them will regard a comma with *and* as more precious than a lively simile. But that is the fault of teachers. Punctuation is no enemy to life and vigor. Any teacher whose nature would make him too zealous about commas is damned already, is already injuring young minds by the exercise of a dispiriting personality. We shall make him no worse by requiring him to teach a precise code. We shall probably make him better, for his mechanical mind will no longer be deluded by the fancy that he is dispensing a manna of grace and charm. And sensible teachers will be just as inspiring as before; you can't put their powers out of gear by asking them to impart a simple body of useful knowledge. Indeed their energy will be better directed if they are not in the dark; they will work with more assurance and peace of mind. They will give our young citizens a much better education. The fact is that, after a training in syntax, a thorough course in punctuation does more to improve the quality of a mediocre student's sentences than any amount of spiritual exhortation.

Just why that should be true is hard to say. One probable reason is that in our headlong, impatient America it is of the greatest benefit to a pupil to have to do something exactly right. We hear the despairing cry from every school and college that our young people are careless, incapable of concentrating accurately, unable to enunciate, unable to phrase definite answers, unable to compose by a predetermined plan. In 1914 the Harvard Board of Overseers

voted that "the faculty be requested to devise suitable measures to remedy this condition of affairs"—the condition, namely, of the failure of students "to write correct and idiomatic English." The Graduate School of Business Administration of Harvard reported in the same year that only twenty-one per cent of its students (all of them college graduates) received a passing mark when their reports were graded as English, and that these were nearly all C's; but only one year later, as the result of "explicit directions for writing," sixty per cent passed. That is always the requirement if instruction is really to instruct—that it be specific. A dramatic coach who says "Act! Why, you must act the part!" gets no result. A composition teacher who says "Write decently" gets no result. We must specify what is to be done. Nor is it sufficient to lay down a set of rules. They will accomplish nothing at all. It is specific work with unpunctuated sentences that brings improvement in style. I should guess that the brain-process is one of gaining familiarity with a great variety of sentence-forms, of making a practical, definite acquaintance with the elements of many types which the pupil would not adopt from his reading, but which he does learn to imitate after he has been forced into intimacy with them. Pupils are Egyptians in bondage required to make brick; punctuation furnishes some straw.

I am no psychologist and vouch for no explanation, but I do vouch for the fact of experience. Year after year I have watched results similar to this: Peterkin has no understanding of the difference between one sentence and two sentences; he is given a drill-book which takes him step by step, with plenty of colloquial comment and illustration, through some six hundred unpunctuated sentences culled mostly from periodicals and novels; he flounders dreadfully, because he "never had any of the darned stuff before"; he goes through it all a second time; thereafter he writes fairly respectable sentences.

If you should classify the illiterate blunders in a million words of composition, excluding mistakes of spelling and syntax, you would find that the great majority were of just the sort that the study of punctuation tends to eradicate. For the last ten years I have been reading about two million words of school themes each year, have been for twenty-four years classifying errors and studying remedies, have observed what works and what does not, have never had any fondness for theories, have not the slightest affection for commas—and I affirm without hesitation that punctuation drill helps to produce decent sentences. The condition is similar to what we discovered about spelling: that the million errors are not a million at all, but a few hundred common forms incessantly reappearing. So of sentence-structure: it is not a case of a thousand kinds of errors, but of a dozen common punctuation blunders that incessantly recur. And just as intensive spelling will remove the great bulk of offensive ignorance, so the greater part of sentence-crudeness will disappear after thorough work in punctuation.

That idea is not peculiar to me; it is now believed in thoroughly by hundreds of capable high-school teachers. Nor is it novel; it was voiced by John Wilson: "Punctuation has not received that attention which its importance demands. Let punctuation form a branch of academical instruction; let it be studied after competent knowledge of English etymology and syntax has been acquired; let the rules be thoroughly comprehended by the pupil. *It is worthy of remark, that, by habituating themselves to the practice of pointing, their attention will naturally be directed to clearness of thought, and accuracy of expression.*"

The Bostonian of the Civil War period would have sympathized with what was said by the supervisor of English who wrote for the *English Journal*, just before the World

War, about sentence sense. Experience had taught her that true instruction is warfare: "I wonder if other schools have to fight as vigorously as we do to eradicate such mistakes as this: 'My little sister is very pretty she has light hair and blue eyes.' " The sentence campaign is a real fight, a long one. Any teacher who has developed the punctuation strategy, who has fought vigorously and waged war for years, knows that nothing else he can do produces a tithe of such fundamental benefit. Plentiful exercises with plain human prose, not with the mystifications of oratory and poesy, are a mighty engine against the grisly legions of carelessness. You may mobilize your forces of "orderly thinking" and inspire them with devoted valor, but they are crude militia until Drillmaster Punctuation has trained them in tactics. His task is long. He is harsh and unromantic. He must begin with grammar and dwell upon it pitilessly. Most recruits and taxpayers consider him brutal and inglorious. But he knows what war really is. He wins victories.

Does it sound like a Fourth of July oration? Perhaps you are thinking of me what Ophelia said of Hamlet: "Help him, you sweet heavens!" Remember the possibility that we comma-fiends can still tell a hawk from a handsaw.

Many Ophelia-like commentators on English have feared that the militarism of punctuation will oppress us with its rigors. But I have never heard that the spontaneity of Young America is endangered. The proper use of punctuation will not shackle youth. Not in the slightest degree will it hinder freedom of expression. The severest teacher of the code might still stimulate the fullest liberty of style. There is nothing in any paragraph of this chapter to discourage license of style, if that is wanted in some quarters. I have no thought of restriction. Yet I shall be so under-

stood. There will be readers whose preconceptions will cause them to remark when they have skimmed through, "Punctuation would algebraicize fancy and plot the flight of winged words!" Not so. This is a gospel of freedom. Any author, young or old, is hereby urged to set down his emotions in phrases as original or graceful or lofty as his imagination can body forth. There is nothing here to hinder even ecstasy. The most highly-wrought verse of Noyes or the most trenchant phrasing of Kipling is conveyed more tellingly because these authors have punctuated according to present usage. A writer ought to choose words, not by grace of Worcester, but by knowledge of usage; so that his design will not be speckled uncouthly. He ought to put them together, not by courtesy of parsings, but by knowledge of idioms; so that his design will not be askew. And with a similar motive he ought to separate them into groups, not through fear of some "authority's" precepts, but by knowledge of what marks really mean today; so that his design will stand out clear and firm.

E. Punctuation as Separation

The business of punctuation is the separation of the parts of composition. The emphasis in teaching should always be on such matters as "separating the sentences," "separating the items," "setting off modifiers," "not splitting the sentence at this point." The scheme outlined on the following pages will show how all the uses of all the marks are matters of separation. "Set off" means to separate parenthetical matter on both sides (though there can be only one comma if the expression comes at the beginning or the end of a sentence). Students should learn to think of the process as an operation for "both sides."

1. COMMA

1. To separate items in a series.
   (*a*) Similar words, phrases, or clauses
   (*b*) Appositives
   (*c*) Addresses and dates
2. To separate independent clauses joined by a conjunction.
3. To set off disconnected expressions.
   (*a*) *Yes, no,* nouns of address
   (*b*) Parenthetical words or explanations
   (*c*) Non-restrictive clauses
   (*d*) Introductory clauses
   (*e*) Quotations

2. SEMICOLON

1. To separate independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction.
2. To separate items that contain commas.

3. COLON

To separate a formal salutation or introduction from what follows.

4. DASHES

To set off all sorts of side-remarks or appositive expressions or abrupt changes of construction.

5. PERIOD, EXCLAMATION MARK, AND QUESTION MARK

To separate sentences or the equivalents of sentences.

F. Punctuation for Sentence Sense

The matter of fundamental importance is the separating of sentences. I will briefly describe the taboos which schools have to set up, and explain certain side-issues that are often confused with fundamental matters.

1. The comma sentence. This is the fault that is supposed to be overcome everywhere before the eighth grade and that is nowhere overcome—not even among teachers of high-school English.* It may be defined for the first year of high school as "Using a comma or nothing for the end of a sentence." It is a failure to realize when a new sentence begins. It is often logical, because the new statement could be expressed by a subordinate clause—thus:

1. Fred carried a new hatchet, it cost a dollar.
2. At noon we came to a ford, there we ate lunch.

The statements after the commas are felt, in the student's mind, as mere modifiers, like *which* or *where* clauses. If students understood this logical justification for what they do and if they did not go beyond the logical limit, no school would ever need to worry about the comma sentence; students could have the same liberty that authors have to separate grammatically independent statements by commas. But students have no conception of any limit. If we allow them an inch of freedom, they will take a hundred miles of license and will always remain in barbarous ignorance of what a sentence is. The kind-hearted teacher who tries to adopt a liberal policy will produce nothing but savagery and will perpetrate a refinement of cruelty upon children who need help. The rigid taboo is the way of kindness. Literature offers cases of comma sentences, but they are rather rare and always seem to indicate distinct subordination of content.

*A conservative estimate is that one-sixth of them do not know surely what a comma sentence is.

2. The dead-line: "grammatical independence." Since there is no possibility of teaching by talking of "subordination in thought content," we make the way easy by establishing an invariable line, clearly drawn, at "grammatical independence." If any statement or question is grammatically able to stand alone as a sentence, it must be punctuated as a sentence. (The semicolon for this purpose is a refinement that can come later. See paragraph 9, page 236.) If this distinction seems pedantic to you, consider that ninety-nine per cent of all the sentences in our literature conform to it. It is the only sensible and useful distinction thus far discovered. It has never done harm when used judiciously. It has done a world of good.

3. The "independent" nouns and pronouns. As was explained in Chapter VII, we help a student best by training him to think of nouns and all pronouns except relatives as "independent" words, which form separate sentences when they are the subjects of verbs. If he opens a new statement with *it* or *they* or *this* or *father*, he is beginning a new sentence and must use a period and a capital.

4. The "independent" adverbs. Sufficient was said in Chapter VII about the importance of an independent adverb (especially *then*, *there*, and *finally*) as an introducer of a new sentence, which must begin with a capital and have a period before it. (Of course a question mark or an exclamation mark may be there, but you will save time and make a more clean-cut impression by speaking of what is almost always the case—a period.) There can be no progress by dealing with the abstraction of "independent thought"; we must be concrete and show the words that usually cause the trouble, the independent pronouns and adverbs, the *its* and the *thens*.

5. Divided quotations. A very common source of comma sentences is divided quotations: "Come in here," he said,

"it's warmer." The comma before *it's* is the unforgivable sin. It has the primal, eldest curse upon it. Students will never see what is wrong until you show them the two sentences without the quotation marks and the introducing words; the speaker used two independent sentences.

6. A conjunction changes all. If a student writes "Fred carried a new hatchet, and it cost a dollar," we may be offended by his conjunction; it makes the sentence much worse rhetorically. But grammatically it rescues the sentence and keeps it from crossing the dead-line. The conjunction converts the whole group into a compound sentence. A conjunction makes the difference between right and wrong —*grammatically.* As a mere question of grammatical structure a string of several independent clauses is a sentence if the clauses are connected by conjunctions. Don't be dismayed. Emphasis on the mere grammatical difference will not increase the percentage of clumsy sentences unless a teacher is very indiscreet. We are establishing a basic fact of structure: two independent clauses may properly be separated: (1) by a period (or a semicolon), (2) by a comma with a conjunction.

7. The kind of conjunction is not important. I was once taken to task by a textbook-maker for using a comma with *for;* he argued that *for* was coördinating, and he seemed to feel that somehow this fact made a difference. The distinction between subordinating and coördinating makes no difference in punctuation. We use a comma before the conjunction in a compound sentence; also we use a comma before non-restrictive subordinate clauses in a complex sentence—thus:

1. Her hands were badly chapped, and she tried to keep them out of sight.
2. She tried to keep her hands out of sight, as they were badly chapped.

8. The "run-on sentence." The term "run-on" has, very strangely, three different senses. If it is used in your school, be sure you understand precisely what meaning is attached to it. (1) Sometimes it is used as a mere synonym for comma sentence. This meaning is confusing and will probably die out. (2) It describes the aimless compound sentence that "runs on and on" with conjunctions—proper grammatically, but odious and illiterate rhetorically. This meaning is useful and is the one that will probably prevail. (3) It is carelessly employed to include both of the previous meanings. This use is worse than confusing; it spoils all understanding of the campaign of grammar and punctuation. For "the conjunction changes all."

9. The semicolon. For many years I put altogether too much stress on semicolons in lower classes. Mr. McComb, of Indianapolis, flashed my error upon me by saying, "If my pupils can learn to use a big, black, round period, I am satisfied." It is true that our first and greatest concern is with the period. The semicolon is, comparatively, a refinement, a rhetorical matter, for advanced classes. I still think it is worth a little comment in the eighth year, for those better pupils who can easily catch the idea. It is by no means above the comprehension of average ninth-year pupils, and they should be encouraged to use it. But the semicolon is always a later subject than the period, a more refined one. The natural approach to it is—after round, black periods are mastered—as a substitute for periods between statements that do not need all the emphasis of separate sentences.

10. The semicolon with a conjunction. A semicolon with a conjunction is a purely rhetorical device, never a necessity, seldom to be mentioned in class. Its meaning is that what follows is to be regarded as more nearly an independent sentence.

11. Elliptical sentences. We must be lenient at first with such elliptical sentences as "All right, sir" and "No matter now," for they are not very common, do not cause very bad offenses, and may be somewhat difficult to explain to a class that is not proficient in grammar. But we must require the most common ones to be punctuated as sentences after they have been explained. Some elliptical sentences have degenerated to mere interjections, like "see here," "come on," "I say." Often it is safe to say nothing about a comma after such expressions.

12. The echo question. Usage makes a comma proper in such a tagged-on question as "You don't think so, do you?" Grammatically this is a sentence-error, but must be allowed in school composition. If you ever have to answer questions about it in class, admit the truth, but advise a dash as safer and usually better.

13. Three or more independent clauses. Another kind of sentence-error which custom sanctions is the use of commas to separate three or more independent clauses which are short and uniform: "The girls made sandwiches, the boys brought cake and ice-cream, and the teacher contributed a bowl of potato salad." I used to advise this exception to the stern law, but found that I could help students better by admitting it only grudgingly; they learn the law and form the habit more easily if they use semicolons. The ordinary student is likely to abuse and extend the exception by framing clauses that are not parallel in form or meaning.

14. The half-sentence fault. All authors,* except Doctor Johnson, have used *which* clauses as independent sentences. They have used all manner of subordinate clauses—especially appositive noun clauses and appositive infinitives—as whole sentences. In recent literature this trick of style

*I learn this from an unpublished thesis by Dr. Aurner of the University of Wisconsin.

seems to be increasing. We are often treated to single nouns standing between periods. Some students consciously adopt this device of authors, but most of them convert fractions of sentences into wholes without the least realization of what they do. Schools must rouse them to consciousness and eradicate their ignorance. Note well that we are not much concerned with eradicating the half sentences. Our fight is against ignorance. So we set up a school taboo against "the half-sentence fault."

15. The sentence-error. Both the comma sentence and the half sentence are proofs of ignorance of what a sentence is. So it is convenient to have one term which describes this fundamental failure. The generally-used term is "sentence-error." Our teaching emphasis is not on the mere structures as errors in themselves, but on the *ignorance* shown by violating the school taboos. For years I made the mistake, which I suppose most teachers have made, of bearing down on sentence-errors as sins in themselves; and all the while I was troubled by the fact that literary models were arrayed against me. After I perceived the real issue—the *ignorance*—I taught with an easy mind.

16. How to permit sentence-errors. One day an artistic youth complained in class that he felt hampered by the school law which forbade him to do what authors do. Somewhat irritated by his protest, I invited him to use all the sentence-errors that his literary yearnings demanded, and added, "But just conform to school regulations thus far: whenever you make a sentence-error, put an asterisk over the critical comma or period and say in a footnote, 'Intentional.'" He was highly pleased. Next week he made five footnotes and received 100 for his theme. The following week he overlooked two critical commas—and received zero. The permission to make sentence-errors always amuses a class and seems to have a good effect. Professor H. Y.

Moffett, of the University of Missouri, has said in the *Tri-State Notes* that college freshmen who take advantage of the permission invariably improve their style. I doubt the wisdom of this liberty for the ninth year, but above that it is often an incentive to improvement.

G. Beware of Rules

Rules vs. habits. The gentle admonition to use a comma before the conjunction in a compound sentence, even if everyone in your class commits it to memory and rattles it off and gives an example and knows enough grammar to comprehend it perfectly, will no more teach punctuation than a sermon will dig a ditch. Punctuation is not a set of precepts. It is a set of introductions to good habits. Any pedagogic bungler can introduce habits to a class; only a determined and resourceful teacher can establish them. He thinks of a rule as a mere bare statement of the kind of work that is to come. I have seldom required students to memorize a rule and have never seen that rehearsing it produced results. But the habit which a rule requires must be understood before proceeding to exercises. The emphasis needed is this: "Always punctuate this way; make this use of a comma habitual in all your writing. But never use any punctuation unless you know a definite reason." The right kind of rule is merely a concise statement of a habit that a class must cultivate. It is a greater sin to use marks without a reason—to "kind of think" that a comma would fit here—than it is to omit a needed comma.

I will now describe the principal kinds of faulty rules which will do damage. The essence of them all is the same —to wit: they are not expressed as concrete descriptions of habits, but as esoteric truths in a treatise on the mystery of punctuation.

1. Dead rules. The ordinary textbook is a morgue for the corpses of rules that were once live truths. "Two words in apposition should not be separated by a comma" is the first rule in a two-hundred-page manual that I had to use for many years. It repeated the opening words of the rule in the old Wilson treatise, which was, very curiously, framed to state the exceptional cases. A capital book issued in 1912 announces that one use of the semicolon is to introduce. Another, bearing on its cover three mighty names, requires a comma to separate a long subject from its verb. "A colon," declares another Composition, "is used to separate the different members of a compound sentence when they themselves are divided by semicolons"—an affirmation that contains only as much truth as "Horses are used to draw street-cars." Such dead things may be harmless. But it is harmful to teacher and student to present them as of equal importance with a rule for a comma before the conjunction *but.* For their effect is to make a school suppose that all punctuation is as lifeless as themselves. "A comma shows where words have been omitted" is common in textbooks, yet the rule was never really born; for it would require a comma in "I like the one, you bought," where no sane publisher or author has ever used it.

2. Mystical rules. Another way in which the ordinary "section" on punctuation does damage is by so misstating the simplest truths that teachers are led to regard the whole subject as nebulous and mystical. For example, "To the mind of the writer, this explanation has much to commend it" is said to deserve a comma because the phrase is out of its natural order; yet such a rule would call for a comma in "Over the door we hung a horseshoe," where no rational punctuator now advises any comma. "Commas are used in a complex sentence to separate the dependent clause from the rest of the sentence." Yes; also commas are not

used for such a purpose; also if a man is lost in a city he will find his way if he goes straight ahead—or turns. Here is the most elusive subject in the whole code (the distinction between a restrictive and a non-restrictive clause) cheerfully committed to one vacuous rule and illustrated by two sentences containing restrictive clauses! Then the author adds, with an artlessness against which all power of sarcasm is feeble, "If the connection is close, the comma is usually omitted." Of the same astounding quality is the rule, "Commas are used to separate the members of a compound sentence when they are short or closely connected," one illustration having the adversative *yet* and the other having five very brief and similar imperatives without any conjunctions. Why should we be told when space is precious that "the dash is sometimes used with the colon"? It is equally true by modern canons that it is poor taste to use a colon so. Suppose a pupil, having learned that "adjective phrases are set off by commas," writes "I bought a couple, of newspapers"; shall we chide him for knowing too much about grammar? It is impossible to speak temperately of such futility masquerading as instruction.

3. Vague and pompous rules. Try to imagine what goes on in Cecilia Potter's mind while she commits to memory "The members of a compound sentence are separated by semicolons when the distinct units of thought require emphasis." You assume that the "members" and the "units of thought" are the same things, but how can Cecilia guess this? You perhaps can associate "require emphasis" with something specific in your own experience, but how shall poor Cecilia understand when the quality of her thoughts demands individualized stress? The advice is utterly vague. The vagueness of the following rule is distinctly pompous, not spoken to children as a definite help, but apostrophizing some unknown rhetorical god: "The semicolon is used when

the clauses are of the same general nature and contribute to the same general effect." If you reflect a few minutes on what such rules do in schools, you will wonder how English has survived.

4. Butcherly rules. "Always omit the comma when it is not necessary to make your meaning clear." Such a rule is an effort to perform surgery with a cleaver, because Jack and Jill have no punctuational gland that operates when a comma is not necessary. Neither have I. If, for example, I read on a billboard, "Here's your pipe daddy," I know perfectly well what the meaning is without any comma before the vocative *daddy;* the comma is not necessary for clearness; it is a convention that high-school students are obliged to observe. I mangle the minds of Jack and Jill if I talk about "necessity." So I butcher their minds if I allow them to repeat the following rule: "Use a comma to separate the clauses of a compound sentence, and to separate coördinate words or groups of words not connected by *and* or *nor.*" That is a commandment which means "Thou shalt make comma sentences." If the heavy instruments of this rule were really introduced into the system of instruction in a school, they would massacre all the other rules.

5. Poisonous rules. "Most of the slight pauses requiring a mark will be properly served by the comma" is from a book containing much good analysis and sound advice. It is true that in all cases of loose modifying I can tell by the degree of pause whether or not to use commas, because I know all about non-restrictive modifiers and parenthetical expressions. But Jack and Jill know nothing; they are trying to learn; they are hampered at every turn by "kind of feeling" that they should stick in a mark; and their feeling is produced by pauses; and their feeling is deleterious about two-thirds of the time. The effort to give instruction by the "pause" method is a lethal gas.

6. Proscribed rules. In the *English Journal* for February, 1919, there is a recommendation from a committee of the National Council that educational publishers should not include in textbooks the six rules that are objected to in the following quotation; the reason given is that the rules are in contradiction to five out of six of the manuals issued since 1900, and that they therefore waste time in schools:

(*a*) Commas are not used to correspond to pauses. Such teaching can produce only confusion and error. (*b*) The colon is no longer used as a mark of separation stronger than a semicolon and weaker than a period. Its only modern function is to introduce. (*c*) Only one manual mentions the use of a semicolon before such words as *namely* when used to introduce appositives, and this manual deplores the rule as "without reason." The authors of five of the manuals use the dash before *viz.*, *e. g.*, *i. e.*, etc. (*d*) Commas are no longer advised after an introductory prepositional phrase—not even after a very long one—unless a writer intends to show that his phrase is parenthetical in meaning. (*e*) A long subject clause is not separated from its verb. *Document 80* of the College Board specifically warns against this use of a comma. (*f*) The dash is not used in combination with a comma.

Now that you have reached the end of such an array of technicalities, and see ahead of you another chapter of the same sort that is equally long, you are full of wonder; you are doubtful, perhaps dismayed. "If all this sort of detailed knowledge is a necessity in my profession," you are thinking, "why did college tell me nothing about it?" You have asked a question too deep for me, one that I can answer only by a prophecy: The time is coming when colleges *will* give this kind of information to prospective teachers of English. The need of it is so obvious to most veterans that we must suppose the training will be given to the novices of the future.

CHAPTER IX

PRESENT USAGE IN PUNCTUATION

This chapter is not for use in class. Many of the questions will never arise there; some of them you may never need to bother your head with. It is designed to furnish what I myself should have been thankful for when I was a beginner, a handy but ample record of the ins and outs of punctuation. If some of it strikes you at first sight as going too much into details, remember that the dictionary's three columns of sub-headed discussion of *but* was not intended to be read at one sitting. For reference purposes a summary must be complete.

Every rule that follows, and every least comment, is in accord with at least two of the books described on page 224; nothing of importance is in contradiction to any one of them, for there is no material difference between them. No observant eyes can look upon present usage without seeing just what these men have seen.

It is in codifying that the differences occur. These are partly due to the kind of readers addressed. De Vinne wrote for compositors, having in mind all conceivable sorts of printed matter; Teall was thinking of authors. Again, there are differences due to the writers' training and kind of life, and to their mental make-ups. They attempt one of the most difficult of intellectual feats—to sort out and give an exposition of an arbitrary lot of social customs. If you have observed how some of the best-informed minds may go astray in giving an account of the uses of words, you will expect any writer on punctuation to fail in some ways to

be clear or consistent or complete or shrewd in analysis. Doubtless my arrangement ramifies into too many particulars. If I were trying to inform the ignorant I should follow a very different plan. But you are not uninformed; and, if I can judge by my own wishes when I consult books of reference, you will prefer completeness to a generalization that lacks just the point you wanted to make sure of.

No faith on this globe is so firmly held as that an all-embracing code cannot be framed. The first—and the last—principal or fellow-teacher that you consult will warn you against any hope of accounting in advance for "every possible case of doubt." Even Teall thinks that "probably it cannot be done." The answer is: "Try to find the case that this code does not clearly account for." Propose to your adviser that he prepare a list of five doubts, not that "could not" be provided for, but that are not actually provided for in the following summary.

You will also be warned against "rigid rules." The reply is that there is precious little rigidity about these rules, that they cannot possibly hamper or stiffen any sensible writer in the least. They merely record what points signify in current usage, and their only purpose is to enable a writer to have free trade with his reader. Ignorance of them is a very real restriction; knowledge of them is freedom from bondage.

1. The Period

The period marks the end of declarative and imperative sentences. An indirect question, or a sentence that merely implies a question without asking it, should be marked with a period.

1. I asked him what he was doing.
2. I wonder what he is doing.

The period is not needed after headings nor after words written in a column; indeed such a use is offensive to most modern printers. The period is not used after contractions written with an apostrophe (i. e., the two marks are not used with the same word), nor after *12th*, *2nd*, etc.

2. The Exclamation Mark

The exclamation mark is used after any form of sentence to show that the writer is not asking a real question or giving a real command or stating a fact or wish, but is exclaiming emotionally. It is most commonly used thus:

Oh, what a sight it was!

But it shows the point of greatest emotion, and hence there are these arrangements:

1. Alas! this is all too true.
2. Good heavens! look at that!
3. There is—alas!—no other way.

Sometimes a series of exclamations or brief questions is printed without capitals. This is because they are to appear as one sentence, as if there were semicolons between. But no semicolon or comma is ever used with the mark of exclamation or question (except in some abnormal case, such as *What Is Education?*, a book by E. C. Moore).

3. The Comma

Uses of the comma can be conveniently grouped under three heads, of which the third is very comprehensive.

I. *Yes*, *no*, and all vocatives are set off.

1. No, he is not here.
2. Yes, it is difficult, my dear sir, to keep from laughing.

Yes and *no* may be followed by semicolons or even periods to show that they have the importance of complete statements.

1. No; that appears to me quite improper.
2. Yes. After long consultation we have agreed.

No comma is used between *O* and the immediately following vocative.

O Moon, how farest thou?

II. Words, phrases, or clauses used as unconnected, coördinate items of a series are separated. (*a*) If two adjectives are not parallel and similar in the way they modify, a comma between them may be wrong. In "There were five new towels" the *five* and the *new* are not coördinate, not similar items in a series. The same is often true of combinations with *old*, *little*, etc., because the first adjective is felt to modify the whole of what follows:

pretty little flower queer old codger

This is extended to a series of three or even four adjectives if the writer really means to indicate that he is building up a modifying mass instead of a series of like modifiers. "He wore that same tattered brown hat" is an extreme type.

(*b*) There may be a series of pairs:

We have to pay extra for tea and coffee, cheese and salads, fruits and sweets.

(*c*) One of the few unsettled points of usage is the comma with the conjunction which joins only the last two items of a series, as in *the plates, knives, and forks.* Thirty years ago the rule was that there should not be a comma before

and; nowadays academic authority is almost unanimous in requiring the comma, and schools must conform to this. But certain first-rate indicators of present usage (the *Saturday Evening Post*, e.g.) do not use the comma. Though the rule requiring the comma may seem fussy, it is strictly logical because it shows a reader how many coördinate items there are. Without the comma the series looks like x+(y+z); we want it to look like x+y+z.

(*d*) There is no comma before *and* Co.:

Scott, Foresman and Company.

(*e*) In general no comma is to be used after the last item, because the meaning of such a comma would be "this last item, or each item since the first, is parenthetical." Sometimes this effect is desired, as in

Cheerfully, even jauntily, he advanced to the scaffold.

(*f*) Repetition is a form of series, in which the last item may be shown as parenthetical for emphasis:

The walls, the very walls, are woven of dreams.

(*g*) Mature writers who know just what they are about often employ a comma to separate two independent statements that are brief, similar, and obviously parallel or contrasting in thought:

The same misleading statements continue to be made, the same exploded falsehoods continue to be repeated.

But this use is a delicate balance of meanings, and can never be tolerated in school. It is deadly there. Modern usage is chary of such a form, though it tolerates a series of three

independent clauses. If this is novel to you, if it seems unreasonable, forbear all logic. Accept it. It is the fact. In the *Outlook* editorials of one issue are:

1. Belgium was an international minor; Greece was an adult.
2. A letter from the Chamber of Commerce is always read, accidents are discussed, and methods of prevention are taught.

It may confuse a class to mention such possibilities, although it may not be necessary to mark them wrong in a theme.

(*h*) In certain cases the comma is used with coördinating conjunctions in a series. One case has been explained in (*c*), page 247. There are two others, which must be prefaced by a classification. Words like the following are not conjunctions at all in a discussion of punctuation, but are independent adverbs, to be used after a semicolon or period: *accordingly, consequently, however, indeed, moreover, nevertheless, still, then, therefore.* There is one big cause of confusion out of the way. Another cause is the grammatical distinction between dependent and independent clauses. Thus *for* is regularly classified as "independent," as equivalent to "and the reason is"; while *because* is called "dependent," equivalent to "for the reason that." Similarly *though* is called dependent in a concessive use and independent when equivalent to *but.* Such demarcations are the subtlest of puzzles, beyond the province of mere grammar. They are refinements which, as Mätzner says, cannot be demonstrated in some cases. In school use *for* is regularly subordinating; *though* may often be called coördinating. A generation ago *so* was hardly admitted to the *Century* as a conjunction; now it is in the commonest use (fearfully common in school) for *so that,* subordinating. With all these psychological values we need have no concern. All doubtful or variant

uses group themselves quite naturally under III, 5 (page 258), as subordinating. This section deals only with those that link or contrast two equal units. Those that link are *and, or,* and some correlatives; those that contrast are *but* and a number of others often used as equivalent: *yet, though, while,* and sometimes *nor* and *only.*

(*i*) No comma is needed before link-words whenever it is easily apparent that they are joining two coördinate items in a series. That statement often extends to the two clauses of a short compound sentence. But if a reader might suppose that these conjunctions are joining the following word, while they really are joining a whole group, warn the eye by a comma.

One or two of them had pistols, and a great many muskets lay in a berth.

The comma shows that *and* does not join *pistols* and *muskets.* This use is sometimes extended to a series of *ands* or *ors* if a writer wishes to show that the items are distinct or deserve separate emphasis:

We need more definite directions, or more sympathetic advice, or at least a willingness to study our problems.

(*j*) The use of a comma before the *and* or *or* of a compound sentence is the most unsettled point in present usage. The reason and the practice are as strong on one side as the other, and no one can guess which way custom will develop. If the clauses are long or different in form, the comma is generally used and is helpful to readers; if the clauses are short and similar, the comma may seem an impertinence. That clears up the whole matter for you and me. But such vagueness brings despair in school. My own experience is

strongly in favor of requiring the comma in every compound sentence. Although for the first six years of my teaching I paid no attention to the matter, I gradually realized that most school sentences are clearer with the comma; also the requirement of a comma helps students to be conscious of the number of *and* sentences they are using. During the last eight years I have found the pressure of class needs constantly increasing the importance of this comma; it never does real harm to a sentence and almost always improves sentences mightily.

(*k*) I have found that ninth-year students improve their sentences when they use a comma before the second verb of a pair if the second verb refers to a different time or mood or form of statement.

1. He rose very slowly to look over the parapet, and then ducked quickly back.
2. We are not obliged to pay, and so need not keep his bill.

In school composition such a comma is most often needed when *and* is used with another conjunction or an adverb: *and so, and hence, and then, and not, and finally.* Occasionally two coördinate words have different constructions dependent on them.

Eat, and drink this malted milk.

(*l*) The adversatives like *but* might almost be said to demand a comma by their "inherent quality." It has seemed to me that boys learn something valuable for sentence structure when they have finally been trained to a habit of "comma before any word that means *but.*" I say "finally" because the establishing of such a habit takes a long while. Present usage is not quite so insistent as I am, but almost.

Whenever a contrast is shown, even between two words, modern custom favors the comma: "not theories, but things"; "warmly human, yet critically stimulating"; "not only wasps, but all the bees." The comma is not unusual even between two adjectives, though it is not customary in such a pair as "poor but honest parents." Two commas are usual, and better in school work, with *not. . . . but.*

She is unconquered, not because of patriotism, but because of the Channel.

(*m*) The comma is regularly used before any conjunction that joins two independent clauses, but this very general truth will produce no results in school. Students must become familiar with "comma before *and,*" "comma before *but,*" "comma before *for*"—each as a separate fact. This form of instruction will extend to "comma before *though,*" "comma before *as* that shows a reason," etc.—in sentences that are complex. We make better progress if we do not trust much to analysis of the sentences as compound or complex, but coach students to feel the separation in meaning before the conjunctions.

(*n*) *So* is a peculiar problem. It used to be regarded as only an independent adverb, but has now established itself as a true conjunction before which a comma is permissible.

Death is a debt, so take what I owe.

So much for usage in the big world. In school we face an entirely different matter—the vicious overuse of *so.* Many good schools now rule, as a deterrent to *so,* that a comma before it will not be accepted.

III. Parenthetical uses can be displayed more easily for reference by arranging them in five divisions, of which the fifth presents the most difficult problem in rhetoric.

1. Appositives are set off. (*a*) Unless they are customarily thought of or spoken as a solid phrase, like

the poet Milton my son John I myself your old wife Joan

The last is a very questionable example, for it looks in print as if *Joan* were one of two or three wives.

(*b*) Titles and degrees that follow a name are written as appositives:

1. A. C. Wyeth, M. P., rose next.
2. J. Langdon Short, Ph. D.

(*c*) An appositive may have *or* before it:

Mrs. Tulliver's teraphim, or household gods.

(*d*) Students always think when studying grammar that an objective predicate is an appositive, and sometimes punctuate it so; but they ought not to.

Duncan made Macbeth *Thane of Cawdor.*

2. The successive items of an address and of a date are set off.

Goldsmith was born at Pallas, County Longford, Ireland, on November 10, 1728, the fifth of eight children.

(*a*) The comma before the name of a state is usually said to show an omitted *in*, but commas are not used nowadays to show omissions, and there is no proof that any *in* has been omitted. Moreover the "omission" idea does not account for the comma after the state; it is "both sides" that needs emphasis.

(*b*) No comma is used between the month and the day of the month, nor in such a form as *in the year 1782*, nor between

the number and the street, nor before B.C., a.m., etc., which show time.

(*c*) Many letter-writers and some stenographers still put commas at the ends of lines when such items occur as the address or heading of a letter or as an address on an envelope. But the use is old-fashioned, is not in favor among those whose opinion is worth most, and is sure to die before long. Such commas accomplish nothing but unsightliness. Periods for abbreviations must be used at the ends of lines:

Allan McCord, Esq.
14 South Avenue
Lancaster
Indiana

3. Words, phrases, and clauses used somewhat parenthetically are set off. Specially common examples are *however*, *nevertheless*, *too*, *then*, *indeed*, *in fact*, *in the second place*, *it seems*, *they say*. (*a*) *However* is nearly always parenthetical, but no expression is in itself parenthetical. There can never be any rule about what must be done with this word or that phrase; it is always a question of "Do I wish to have this understood as parenthetical?"

(*b*) The best judgment of today is to be wary of using commas with such modal adverbs as *indeed*, *perhaps*, *possibly*, because they are much more likely to be close modifiers in the writer's actual thought, and because if he insists on expressing himself with so many jerky asides he tires us. In the following the writers seem to be using the words with real parenthetical meaning:

1. There is, indeed, no other possible reason.
2. It is conceivable, perhaps, that Jane cried.
3. Scott may have decided, possibly, that suicide was justifiable.

In the following the words are close modifiers:

1. Indeed you may.
2. You can perhaps be of some assistance.
3. There may possibly be a better road.

There is a story of an eminent university official who called up an editor's office to say that he feared he had omitted the commas with a *perhaps*, his notion being that the word, not the thought, required setting off.

(*c*) Never discuss such words and phrases on the basis of their position in the sentence; for the fact that they are "introductory" (or the notion that they are "out of their natural order") has nothing to do with punctuation. The only question to discuss is the *meaning*—whether the words would have to be set off by *two* commas if they were within the sentence. Insist always on the "both sides" idea. This is most important also with terminal expressions, as will be seen when we come to the dash. You and the students will always be in danger unless your test is "How would it be in the middle of the sentence?"

(*d*) Phrases are never set off because they are introductory. Students (and many teachers) are passionately fond of that comma and can with difficulty be reconciled to omitting it after even such a brief phrase as

In 1856 he sailed for Europe.

Much less are they content with

Through the plate-glass windows of his office in the tenth story of the Metropolitan Building we could see her funnels.

But no comma is called for after *Building*. The modern notion is that phrases ought not to be "out of their natural

order," that a writer ought to place them coherently, that commas would usually belie his real meaning by indicating that the phrase is parenthetical.

(*e*) Occasionally a well-placed phrase may happen to create a misunderstanding of the writer's meaning—as, for example,

> In comparison with this more expensive food means nothing,

where at first glance a reader might think it was *this food.* So the eye might erroneously read *greeting on the deck* in the following:

> But during all the greeting on the deck lies the body of the dead captain.

Modern usage tolerates a comma in such predicaments if there is real need of disjoining a modifier—not otherwise. Real need is rare.

(*f*) *Etc.* is always considered parenthetical; also conversational *well* and *why* at the beginning of a sentence; and usually conversational *now* is set off to distinguish it from the adverb of time.

1. Well, what do you say?
2. Why, I hardly know.
3. Now, that is just the point.

4. Participial and other adjectival expressions that modify in an appositive way are set off.

1. But Nat, fearing some trick, would not enter.
2. My wife, pale and trembling, clasped her little ones.
3. Struck by this answer, the judge paused.

(*a*) Active participles are overworked in themes. Students require from the English participle all sorts of services for which it is not strong enough—e. g.:

The new radiator thumped and banged every time the steam came on, being poorly installed by a green workman.

That sentence may be correct, for *being* modifies *radiator;* but students are likely to be clumsy when they use participles to explain cause or circumstances; a clause is safer.

(*b*) Most students would be more likely to explain the cause of the thumping by an entirely different construction, by a nominative absolute, "it being (or it having been) poorly installed." An absolute construction is always to be set off.

(*c*) Participles are often predicate adjectives or objective predicates and not to be set off:

1. The wind goes whistling.
2. The rope could be seen dangling.
3. We found him hunting.

(*d*) They are often close modifiers:

The man walking on the other side sees us.

(*e*) By a curious perversity students who are careless about the appositive participle in "Rounding the buoy, we started for home" will use a needless and improper comma with the gerunds in "After rounding the buoy we started for home" or in "Rounding the buoy was not difficult."

(*f*) Sometimes an *ing* word that looks like such a participle is in meaning an ellipsis for a closely-modifying clause: "Coming down he felt all right" (="when he was coming down").

(*g*) Non-restrictive phrases are to be set off:

1. His legs were thick, like an alligator's.
2. The scenery was placid, with now and then some cottages.
3. The room in which he sat, with its simple furniture, was as unpretentious as himself.

The scenery was not "placid with cottages"; the man did not "sit with furniture." But agreeable non-restrictive phrases are not very common in themes; the disagreeable ones usually result from ambiguous arrangement of words.

(*h*) In a sentence like the following it is proper to omit the comma before the participle:

He was fagged out; but wishing to be polite, he began a conversation.

This is to show that *wishing* is not parenthetical after *but;* it is appositive before *he.* For school use, however, such a nicety should not be discussed. "Both sides" is your maxim.

5. Non-restrictive clauses are set off:

1. He was loyal, though he was dishonest.
2. The reference is to Chaucer, who is called the father of English poetry.
3. She ushered me to the front hall, where I hoped to find my overcoat.

These often appear as "introductory" or "terminal" and are sometimes so classified, but ought to be thought of as a kind of parenthetical expression, as a "both sides" matter. The great question always is "Does the clause modify closely?" There is no universal formula for getting the answer. The most generally applicable test that I know is "Does the clause mean *that particular one* or *that particular kind of?*" (*a*) As a matter of fact we adults "feel" that a

clause is not restrictive, and our analysis of that feeling is likely to be that there is a slight pause in reading. There is a pause; that is a pretty sure test for us. But it leads to endless error. Compare the time-halt before the two following clauses from Kipling and see how debatable the questions of punctuation remain:

1. And once from the north where he had doubled back eight hundred miles.

2. "There is no holding the young pony from the game," said the horse-dealer when the Colonel pointed out that vagabonding was absurd.

How *you* will pause, because you detect which clause is restrictive, is not the point. What will the student do when he is *trying to find out* which is restrictive? But as soon as you apply "from that particular north where" and "at that particular time when the Colonel pointed out," you will get light.

I can testify that the hour when I first saw the value of this test marks an epoch in my experience. Before that I could never make headway. The student who has learned to experiment by trying "that particular" before the antecedent may conquer a mystery that would otherwise baffle him forever.

(*b*) Again, we analyze our feeling by saying that the clause is not so essential to the principal idea, that taking it out would not detract essentially; whereas the removal of a restrictive clause leaves a mere grammatical skeleton like *Make hay* or *No boy can be popular.* But this test is vague and is seldom useful.

(*c*) For us and for the students there is only one test that I have yet discovered: *that particular one.* It applies to all varieties of clauses, as illustrated by the sentences on the next page.

1. They fight because they are attacked.	1. "for that particular reason"
2. He came when we were sitting down to dinner.	2. "at that particular time when"
3. Look in the drawer where he keeps his money.	3. "at that particular place where"
4. He died that we might be saved.	4. "for the particular purpose that"
5. We finally detected the man who was making the trouble.	5. "that particular man who"
6. They were grouped as actors are at the end of a play.	6. "in the particular way that"

But notice how *as* adds another idea in the following:

They were grouped with reference to an audience, as actors are at the end of a play.

After I had found this formula for relatives, I was two more years in learning to apply it to all sorts of modifiers. The teacher who expects to succeed with non-restrictive clauses must prepare the way with participles. The conception is difficult for the average student and can seldom be completely taught before the tenth year; some schools defer it to the eleventh or even the twelfth year.

(*d*) The greatest error in my tactics used to be too much emphasis on deciding which kind of clause we were dealing with. I argued cases pro and con. I learned to do better (though I can hardly describe details) when I emphasized the "non-restrictive" side of the question, asking, "Is it non-restrictive?" Presumably the great majority of clauses are restrictive; with these we are not concerned, for they require no punctuation. We want to detect the minority, the non-restrictive clauses, for they must be set off. A useful question is: Does the clause mean "and I will add

by the way"? Every non-restrictive clause has somewhat the effect of "and I will add" or "and on the side I might say"—some sort of "and" effect.

(*e*) Students always hope for a rule that there must be a comma before *because*, *where*, etc. There is no such rule. The writer must decide whether he means *for the particular reason that*, *at the particular place where*. Bright students will see the absurdity of "Don't go for the particular reason that you might catch smallpox," because the *for* means "and the reason for not going is." No sensible person could speak of "that particular Florida where," because he knows of only one Florida; if he modifies *Florida* by a *where* clause, he must mean an "and" effect, adding some information. Nearly always a clause that modifies a proper noun is non-restrictive.

(*f*) The following always introduce non-restrictive clauses: (1) *as* and (2) *since* showing a reason, (3) *for*, (4) *so*, and (5) *so that* showing result.

1. He refused to join us, as he was suspicious of our purpose.

The omission of this comma before "*as* that shows a reason" is the sure mark of an uneducated or unsensitive mind, and is an extremely common fault in school composition.

2. Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part.
3. Don't hurry, for you have plenty of time.
4. The porter had been most unobliging, so we gave him no tip. (This type of "so" sentence is always to be discouraged in school.)
5. The natives were in an ugly mood, so that our plight was really serious.

So that showing purpose may occasionally be restrictive.

The dance was cut short so that we might take the midnight boat (i. e., "in order that we might").

(*g*) Some novelists and all secondary students are excessively fond of additive *whens* and *wheres*.

1. In this manner we all sat ruminating upon schemes of vengeance, when the other little boy came running in.
2. Her object was to gain a small port about two leagues distant, where she had provided a vessel for her escape.

If used, they must have the comma, and the necessity for the comma can best be shown by explaining them as equivalent to *and then, and there*.

(*h*) The relative *that* is usually restrictive.

This is the cat that ate the rat that lived in the house that Jack built.

But non-restrictive uses are frequent and normal, even to the extent of being set off with dashes or parentheses.

When I was lonely (that am so no more).

Whoever, whatever, etc., are always restrictive if they are relatives.

1. Whoever did such a deed ought to confess.
2. Whatever he puts his strong hand to is sure to succeed.

In the first sentence *whoever* is a relative, having for its antecedent the understood *he* that is the subject of *ought*. But in such constructions as "Whoever he is, I'm not afraid of him" the whoever clause is adverbial, modifying *am;* and such clauses are almost sure to be non-restrictive.

(*i*) Noun clauses used as subject or object should never be set off.

That my colleague and I should have decided to leave our usual guide at home during the one successful trip of the year seemed a perversity of fate.

They may be long, the eye may need a rest, there may be a pause, many editors still use a comma after a long subject, most rhetorics prefer it—in spite of all those pseudo-reasons the practice is so antagonistic to present notions that it is surely dying, is all but dead. Even in such occasional oddities as "Whatever is is right" it is better not to try to make a comma do what it is not fitted to do. The *Century* prints the quotation "That that is is" without a comma. Noun clauses used as appositives are not set off except for giving the effect of "namely" or "as follows."

1. The idea that the earth is round was not original with Columbus.
2. No saying was oftener in his mouth than that fine apothegm of Bentley, that no man was ever written down but by himself.

(*j*) Clauses of comparison introduced by *than, so . . . that, as . . . as* are closely restrictive and are not set off.

He was so much engrossed in his delicate task of measuring the infinitesimal difference that he did not look up.

(*k*) The introductory adverb clause is one of the very few cases in which present usage is not settled. Before discussing it we must clear up two very common misunderstandings. (1) Noun clauses and adjective clauses are never the sort that can be described as "introductory"; an introductory clause is always adverbial, beginning with such a conjunction as *if, when, since;* (2) The rule has nothing to do with non-restrictive meaning. If an introductory clause is non-restrictive, it has a comma for that reason. The next paragraph is about an entirely different matter, the purely arbitrary matter of the position of the clause at the beginning of the sentence. A rule very generally taught (especially in colleges) requires that an adverb clause which

begins a sentence must have a comma after it because of its position—even though it may be clearly restrictive in meaning. If an introductory adverb clause is also non-restrictive, it is said to deserve a comma for two different reasons.

The question is best approached by way of phrases. Introductory prepositional phrases used to be set off because of their mere position at the beginning of the sentence, and to this day there is a very prevalent feeling that if they are long they should have the comma. But the modern system knows nothing about relative length; it is based on disjunction in meaning, and it rules that an introductory phrase is not to be set off unless it is non-restrictive in meaning. All signs are that the clause is going the same course. Some careful weeklies still insert the comma, but the newspapers are indifferent to it; and newspapers have thus far in history infallibly shown what the conservatives were going to do later. Their editors are studious to make matter easy to read, are more sympathetic, can venture to try experiments, watch each other's style shrewdly, adopt readily what proves advantageous. One of the most conservative punctuators in the country has declared that what the dailies do now the weeklies will soon be doing. Hence little attention need be paid to punctuating an introductory clause. I require it in exercises, but do not follow it up much except for *if* clauses, which are not likely to be closely restrictive when used by students to open a sentence. In this book I have nearly always used the comma after introductory clauses, even short and restrictive ones; in so doing I am not following my own choice, but am deferring to academic preference.

When an introductory clause comes within a subordinate clause, a comma after it would usually hinder more than help—e. g.:

The modern notion is that *if a phrase is out of its natural order* the writer has been clumsy.

A similar case is seen in

The police, or "bulls" as he calls them, are friendly.

A comma before *as* would be logical, but would deceive the eye by breaking the continuity of the whole interjected expression. If an author wishes a comma in such a parenthesis, he should use dashes to set off the whole.

The police—or "bulls," as he calls them—are friendly.

(*l*) In the sentence "And even if you can't see why, do as I ask," there would be reason in putting a comma before *even*, but the reasons against it are stronger. (1) The clause would look parenthetical, (2) *and* is not joining simply *do as I ask*, but the whole complex sentence. The comma after such an initial conjunction is omitted.

(*m*) A direct quotation of a speaker's words is set off. The quotation may come (1) after or (2) before or (3) on both sides of the introducing words (which are, grammatically, the main clause of the sentence).

1. He replied, "We did not."
2. "Then all's well," purred Mr. Coy.
3. "This is," quoth Toby, "a case of cakes and ale."

No capital is used after the introducing words, but the beginning of the quotation is capitalized, as in (1). No comma is used with another mark.

1. "Where are we?" he whispered.
2. "Oh, you scoundrel!" she hissed.

The use of such introducing verbs as *hissed* and *purred*, which describe the way of speaking or the accompanying actions, has recently been extended to a comical length, as in "calmed Mrs. Young" or "smoked Algernon." Such purely descriptive introducing verbs must come after the quotation if they are not to cause barbarous bungles and sentence-errors in themes. Introducing verbs sometimes cannot have a quotation for an object and must therefore be used in separate sentences.

Dorothy spoke next. "I think he's not a gentleman."

An indirect quotation is not set off.

I declared that my only wish was to help him.

No comma or capital should be used with a quoted expression that is used as a component part of the sentence.

The statement that we have "moiled and pothered too long" is only partially true.

4. The Semicolon

(*a*) The semicolon is used between the items of a series if one of the items contains a comma.

A civic dignitary, being ill, and fanciful in proportion, went from doctor to doctor; and having arrived at death's door, sent for Peter.

This is not necessarily because of the importance of the items, but in order that a sentence may not appear divided into more parts than it actually contains, in order that the main

parts may be easily recognizable. The stock illustration is an editorial type of sentence containing three members, each of which has commas within it.

> A moral is drawn, an inference from some incident; this inference, because it is philosophical, will be large and general; it may therefore include some kindred thought as an introduction to another incident.

Needless to say, students seldom compose in that style. The semicolon is often useful, and is advised by rhetorics, even when only one item contains one comma.

> On the roof was a toy windmill, which Fritz was very proud of; and alongside this was his father's anemometer.

This principle of the "one-commaed item" is applied by heedful writers to compound sentences whose brevity might not seem to require a semicolon. Glance at the following:

> This must sound queer to you, and even though I had leisure to explain, you might not be convinced.

It appears at first glance to consist of three coördinate clauses, but in fact there are only two. A semicolon before *and* is preferable, not because of the length of what follows, but because at that point there is greater disjunction of meaning than after *explain*. The same reasoning could well have been applied to the following, quoted from a writer whose style is usually crisp and clear:

> More and more he was being forgotten, though, he saw, and it was this which troubled him.

Students often profit by learning how to use a semicolon for such sentences.

(*b*) The same rule that was given for a commaed series holds for a semicoloned series: if only the last two items are joined by *and*, the semicolon should be used with it to show the three coördinate items.

I saved his life from a bear; he mine in the Rhine, for he swims like a duck and I like a hod o' bricks; and we saved one another's lives at an inn in Burgundy.

The second, very much more important, use of the semicolon is to show that sentences grammatically independent are closely connected in thought.

He can't hear; he's deaf.

This use is specially needed for a divided quotation of two independent sentences.

"He can't hear," whispered Matilda; "he's deaf."

Make these two uses picturesque by calling them the "double-comma" and the "half-period." A useful maxim is "A semicolon never introduces anything." Students are fond of putting it after *My dear Sir* and before a quotation.

So much for pedagogy. Only a few comments are required on usage. In its "half-period" function a semicolon always signifies that what follows is to be understood as having the value of an independent predication, though it may not be one grammatically. Hence authors who wish to be impressive sometimes separate a series of phrases, or even single words, by this heavy mark.

The little man talked for a long while, even until dawn; and not always quite consistently.

Especially common (and often effective in skilful hands) is the use before coördinating conjunctions, and sometimes

before subordinating words. This says to a reader, "Regard what follows as equivalent to an independent statement."

In the teeth of my opposition she forced a confession; which, I am glad to say, convinced me.

But students must not be allowed to put a semicolon before subordinate expressions. Tell them that they may exercise their esthetic judgment after they have graduated from college. The word following the semicolon is not capitalized. Yet a semicolon is regarded as so much like a period that dashed-off words do not require the second dash.

He had been defeated—as was expected; he retrieved himself—which was not expected.

Before a conjunction we may use either a comma or a semicolon or a period; the choice depends upon the degree of independence that is to be indicated.

5. The Colon

The colon formally introduces a list of particulars:

The following translation is intended primarily for two classes of readers: first, for those who desire to obtain knowledge of its contents; second, for those who—etc.

For the punctuation of an introductory word before it see the discussion under The Dash, page 273. It is also used in a very significant way before a sentence: it indicates that the following statement is in apposition with what precedes, is explaining concretely what has been put in general terms.

But the curse is at work: the severance between good and evil cannot be closed again, and the tragic end comes in spite of the efforts of Arthur and Lancelot.

This use contributes to precision in an analytical style. A capital after the colon signifies that what follows is quoted or is of independent importance.

Right here a baffling question arises: How can any inheritance-tax prevent a man from giving property to his children before he dies?

The colon is the commonest and best mark after the salutation of a letter. The comma now seems rather quaintly old-fashioned; the combination of a colon and a dash is unsightly and is going out of favor. A colon is useful for introducing long or important quotations. It always carries the suggestion of "as follows." The colon is omitted if it would have to be combined with a question mark:

What did the candidate mean by beginning his composition as follows? "Caesar! Julius Caesar! That sartorial hero!"

A colon cannot be used to introduce matter that is parenthetical within a sentence, because there would be no proper way to mark the end of such matter; a pair of dashes is used.

Potter first shouted the opening words of the *Aeneid*—"Arma virumque cano"—and then bawled out, "This way to the egress!"

6. Quotation Marks

(*a*) There is some indication, but only slight, that single marks are coming into favor. The all but universal practice is to use double marks for a direct quotation, single marks for a quotation within a quotation, and for a quotation within a quoted quotation (if one must ever write such a

thing) double marks. No sensible author would write such a tangle as the following, though it is logically possible:

"Well," said he, "why do you keep repeating, 'We heard the old cry, "Make way for liberty!" '?"

A typographer would balk at this and would refuse to publish that row of terminations. Such puzzles originate only in puzzled brains.

(*b*) Ordinarily quotation marks are outside a mark of interrogation or exclamation; but they are inside if the mark of question or emotion is not a part of the quotation.

1. If only you had not said, "I am indifferent"!
2. John asked, "Did you hear me say, 'Come on'?"

(*c*) If the introducing words are at the end of a line, the comma must be after them on that line and the quotation marks at the beginning of the next line.

(*d*) If a speaker's sentence is interrupted, left unfinished, use a long dash and put the quotation marks after the dash. No period is needed.

"Look!" he gasped. "Well, did——"

7. Parentheses

Parentheses show an explanation of some word or statement. Since a necessity of stopping to explain suggests involved thought, our quick-moving, straightforward generation is impatient of parentheses. They are at present being supplanted by dashes.

Except for enumeration in scholarly works they always appear as a pair of marks following the matter that is being commented on. Hence their function is peculiarly plain, and there is almost complete agreement as to punctuation

connected with them. This was not always so. As late as 1881 Bigelow's handbook enjoined the following punctuation:

> Fifteen pauls, (a scudo and a half,) buonomano included.

This is copied from the Riverside edition of Lowell of 1892. Nowadays we should never see anything but

> Fifteen pauls (a scudo and a half), buonomano included.

Such a bit of ancient history would deserve no mention here if it were not that this puzzling doubled comma still persists to some extent in connection with a pair of dashes. The curious perversity with parentheses has been duly buried; the same perversity with dashes is dead, but not yet committed to the grave.

The universal present ruling for parentheses is to use exactly the same marks, in the same ways, that would appear if the parenthesis were removed. The matter between the marks is punctuated just as it would be if it were not parenthetical, except that a sentence is not capitalized and that a terminal comma is not used:

> Promptly at ten he appeared (he had been set on by Wakem, of course) and was admitted.

But an independent sentence made parenthetical between two sentences begins with a capital and has its terminal point inside the second parenthesis:

> "Come here at once," I commanded. (Can you imagine my speaking so harshly?) "What have you done?"

Within a sentence there never can be any mark of punctuation just before the parentheses, except in some extraor-

dinary case, like "The issue of May 2, 1925, (which is now out of print) contained the 'Uncle Jasper' article."

Students seldom have a real need for parentheses. Indeed they rather need to be discouraged from such asides, because they easily fall into the way of using an aimless "as I said before" or "I forgot to say that." They will most awkwardly prevent ambiguity of pronouns by repeating in parenthesis the very noun for which they have used a pronoun. And they are very fearful that after they have been speaking of a character his name will not be known to apply to him; hence they wearisomely append "for that was my hero's name."

8. The Dash

Some writers whose habits were fixed more than thirty years ago regard the dash as sensational, and will employ it very sparingly or not at all in formal composition. It has an emotional function, to indicate abruptly-changed constructions or unexpected turns of thought.

1. "I tell thee men will laugh—ah!" She ended in a little scream.
2. The—but, pooh!—it is not for an old man like me, etc.

Yet Poe had no patience with the prejudice against the dash. He says, "The disuse of it has been brought about by its excessive employment about twenty years ago. The Byronic poets were all dash." He felt that the essential meaning of the mark was to show apposition, equivalent to "or, to make my meaning more distinct," and concluded: "Therefore the dash cannot be dispensed with." He used it frequently.

I have never discovered in school use the danger that textbooks warn us of. To be sure, if students are allowed

to "kind of think," the dash might usurp the places of all other marks. But if only definite uses are permitted, the dash is a good ally of a teacher.

Dashes are helpful in making all sorts of appositive and explanatory expressions stand out clearly to a reader's eye:

> Unless Calles should do what he has never yet succeeded in doing—establish a competent government and maintain order—the next duty would be to occupy strategic centers.

A pair of dashes shows matter that is more necessary to convey the real thought than is shown by parentheses, matter that is less like a pure explanation or an aside. Dashes are less formal than parentheses, do not show such aloofness. They have grown in favor so much that nowadays almost every page of staid editorials furnishes examples. A common form of this use is when the dashed-off matter is at the end of the sentence.

> Two of the members have opposed the action of the majority—Governor Montague and Representative Shirley.

This is so frequent in all editorials, rhetorics, and literature of today that it is thought of by many as a distinctive form. In reality it is only a species of the "both sides" use.

It would be logical to use a comma after the second dash in cases where the comma would be required if the dashed-off matter were removed, as in

> If you can—and I hope you can—, we shall be much pleased.

This would be exactly like the use with parentheses. But the comma looks so remote and dangling that printers were never willing to put it there; instead they evolved a practice

of reduplicating, placing a comma before each dash. These commas were completely unreasonable and never assisted the eye, but previous to 1880 few American publishers dared omit them, and to this day there are unobservantly conservative people to whom the custom is very dear. Yet the custom is thoroughly dead. The *New York Evening Post*, a most conservative journal, abandoned the combination so many years ago that the present proof readers know nothing about it.

The most singular way in which rhetorics have lagged a generation behind actual practice is in advising a semicolon before such introductory words as *namely* and *e. g.*, where present usage puts a dash. They rehearse this Wilsonian rule as trustingly as though their highest duty was to be blind to facts. Several revisers of textbooks during the last decade have abandoned it. All must discard it soon, for it is an utter untruth.

It originated quite naturally from such a form as this:

He is not popular; that is, he is not in the public eye.

Here the explanation is put in the form of an independent, coördinate statement. *That is* may be employed so, frequently to the extent of beginning a new sentence. Similarly it may be argued that *namely* and words of that kind are elliptical for *these are by name* or *these are as follows*. If they are thus understood and if they are always employed at the end of a sentence, a semicolon is a reasonable mark. It is utterly unreasonable under any other conditions. (1) If you should wish to put the appositive matter within the sentence, you would have to surround it with a pair of semicolons, as is actually done in a remarkable quotation in Johnson's *Dictionary* under the word *namely*. But no

rhetorician has the hardihood to do this; in his own text he at once employs a pair of dashes, putting a comma after the *namely:*

> There is one argument—namely, the increase of wages—which is peculiarly appealing.

And this is the fact of modern usage. (2) If there is no *namely* (or any such word as *viz., to wit, as*), the semicolon would become monstrous, for it would then appear as a mark of introduction, as a colon. Such a function it has never had. No rhetorician will ever use it so in his writing. (3) To insist (as we must) that a semicolon never introduces, and then to teach that it introduces a list of particulars with *namely,* is wrong pedagogy. It is curious to see how several modern text-makers forget their rule and exhibit present usage in the body of their work by employing the dash constantly before appositive constructions, even before the very words that they have listed under their semicolon rule. (4) The semicolon rule is contrary to facts. I have examined two yards of grammars and dictionaries without finding such a use in any book less than fifty years old. Of course it appears not infrequently when an old-fashioned writer's copy is being followed; even in the *Outlook* and the *Post* it is seen occasionally to introduce the equivalent of a statement. Otherwise it is a ghost of a former reality.

The introductory word can be found punctuated with every possible permutation of comma, dash, and colon, but there is no body of usage to support most of these variations. It is unusual to find the colon before or the dash after, and it is illogical. If a handbook to which you are referring advises on page 10 that a colon should precede *viz.*, look on pages 55 and 56, where you will see the colon quite properly after *viz.* and *thus,* and always after *as follows.*

Namely (which I use to represent all such words) need not be considered parenthetical, and often is not in scholarly works that have to eliminate as much punctuation as possible. Personally I wish the world had taken this cue from the scholars, but it has not; in ordinary composition *namely* is parenthetical. The choice between comma and colon to follow *namely* is entirely a matter of how formal the introduction is to be. Hence we have the simple and obvious principle that there is a big disjunction before *namely* (to set off all that follows), and a small disjunction after *namely* (to set off that mere word). This shows how ambiguous is the very common practice of using a comma both before and after, which ought to mean that *namely* and the two commas could be taken out without destroying the continuity. That is what the commas really do mean in the following:

> We have one great fear—the fear, namely, that you will desert us.

That is precisely what they do not mean in the following:

> But it does indicate something else, namely, an expectation that they can succeed.

Both the logic and the facts of present usage call for a dash before this last *namely* and a comma after it. A comma before and the colon after *to wit* and *viz.* are common today, especially in legal phrasing; but the comma is a weak mark for such a position. The dash is normal.

Present usage reduces to one simple ruling: Put a dash before and a comma after; use the colon after to show importance or formality. This is simple; it is consistent with the facts and the reasoning of modern usage; it is always applicable, whether the appositive matter is terminal or medial, whether or not there is an introductory word.

Perhaps the most useful function of dashes and parentheses is to prevent a confusing array of commas that are performing different grades of duty, as in

He sometimes served a plain dinner, a veal pie, or a leg of lamb, and a rice pudding.

A dash after *dinner* would show that that word is not the first of four coördinate items. In the following each comma is properly employed, but the whole series is bewildering:

Only four Republicans, Coates, Grattan, Holden, and Kissel, upheld him, the other four votes coming from Grady, Frawley, and Sullivan, Tammany members, and Cullen of Queen's.

Dashes, parentheses, and quotation marks are the only marks allowed at the beginning of a line.

9. This Chapter Is Only For Emergencies

Only occasionally will you encounter any punctuation puzzle that is not definitely provided for in this chapter. There is always the possibility of some absurd construction which could be indicated only by absurd punctuation—e. g.:

Why do you ask, "May I come in?"?

The last question mark is patently nonsensical.

You may perchance be told that there are two schools of punctuation—"open" and "close"; that the former means getting rid of all possible points; that its vogue is chiefly in slap-dash newspapers; that the latter is more refined and is cultivated in the college world; that the author of *What Is English?* is a devotee of the open system. Or you may hear an equally good argument that the author favors a

close system. I am a devotee of nothing but the safest and soundest present usage. No personal preference has been admitted to this chapter.

Don't lug much of the treatise into class. It doesn't belong there. It is only to furnish you complete knowledge for emergencies, just as a dictionary tells you thousands of things that never come up in recitations—but they might. You need to know beforehand. The few big matters in school are quotations; both sides of non-restrictive matter; comma before *but, so, for, as;* the difference between a comma and a period. This last is worth much more than all the rest together.

CHAPTER X

MINIMUM ESSENTIALS

A. A Caution Against Essentials

The principle of "Minimum Essentials" is the practical and ancient idea that students must at least learn the rudiments. To some of us that seems a rather obvious necessity in any school that pretends to fit children for life, but it is by no means obvious to many high-minded persons who hold lofty places in our educational system. Not that they dare deny outright that elementary knowledge should be mastered, but that the actual process of insuring mastery seems to them cruel and subject to abuse. They wish education to be gentler and sweeter; they believe that there are ways of imparting the rudiments incidentally while we keep our thoughts on more elevated subjects. These fears and hopes are not without foundation, as I will indicate in this section. If a teacher does not understand the opposition to a program of minimum essentials, he will misunderstand the principle and vitiate his teaching.

Listen to the words of a witty gentleman, a scholar, an honored teacher of university English for a generation, clever in after-dinner talk and admired as a speaker before conventions, a loved and affable character. He is giving advice to teachers of written composition.

> Keep the blue pencil under cover until the snow flies. Fluency and confidence first; accuracy later. . . . Free and animated discussion about the last ball game will do more toward per-

fecting English speech than reciting all of the rules of rhetoric. . . . The motivation of English Composition should never be the fear of a low mark. . . . The object of all this writing is not "correctness," though of course we desire as much correctness as we can get. . . . The ungrammatical should be set to write upon Some Prevalent Errors in English Usage, the careless upon Good Form in Writing. . . . No one can teach English composition well who has not lived broadly and deeply, touching life at many points. . . . The feeling that some one sympathizes is worth all the goads in the hands of all the drill-masters that ever were. . . . Only repression and discouragement and wrong-headed teaching can chill the normal child's desire to obtain a mastery of his native speech.

There can be no question that the writer of that advice was born with a desire to master his native speech, or that he did not need a goad, or that he could at the age of fifteen write winsomely upon "good form in writing." It is true, my dear colleague, that minimum essentials might have hindered him in his youth and that the ultimate aim of composition is not "correctness" and that a mere insistence on fundamentals will not teach composition. It is true that a teacher who relies only on correctness is an evil in the world, and that over-emphasis on minimum essentials is wrong.

That such mechanically-minded teachers exist is everywhere assumed, and I suppose truly. They are the bane and shame of our profession. The dread of them has animated all the opposition to minimum essentials. It is this fear which is behind a forceful editorial in the *English Journal* for May, 1923:

Even the compilers of the excellent new Minnesota Syllabus of High School English become so absorbed in stating minimal essentials (mechanics) grade by grade that they forget to provide standards of actual composition. Doubtless simply an over-

sight, but symptomatic of a widely prevalent educational myopia. Is not the body more than raiment and the life more than meat? These matters of rule with which we all tend to become so preoccupied are essential, certainly; but essential to what? To the general effectiveness of expression—of which they are not the only factors. Thought and certain qualities which for want of a better name we must call rhetorical are more potent than mere correctness.

The editor speaks of "the rabid minimum essentialists" and concludes thus:

> The teacher who makes classroom composition as genuine communication as is that of other situations will not find it difficult to teach his pupils as much mechanics as do the devotees of drill and drive, and not a little of that clear, vigorous thinking and simple effective expression of which they frankly despair.

Those earnest words are worth heeding, for they present an important idea which teachers are apt to leave unmentioned when they are concerned with the daily battle against carelessness. Beware of meriting that sort of reproof, or even seeming to merit it. Until you have experience and have gained some standing in the community, do not run the risk of being called "a devotee of drill and drive." There is no irony lurking in that advice, no effort at humor or sarcasm. It is honest-to-goodness counsel, derived from my own sad experience when I was ignorant of how the world would interpret me if I shouted for rudiments and forgot to say anything about "clear and vigorous thinking." The world wants to hear uplifting sentiments, and you must be wary of giving offense by talking of essentials.

Great men never speak of essentials when they tell what is wrong with education. An example is a pamphlet by Charles W. Eliot, issued in 1916 by the General Education

Board: *Changes Needed in American Secondary Education.* There is not a word about a better spelling conscience or more sentence sense. The trouble with high schools is said to be that they do not teach the power of observing in the scientific way and do not train in manual skills. If you should become an apostle of some such large, revolutionary ideal, you would be in good odor; but to champion the mere scientific observation of periods and some manual skill in spelling might make you undesirable.

Prominent educators, even if they write about testing teachers' knowledge of rudiments and emphasize thoroughness with rudiments, safeguard themselves by a pleasant peroration like this:

> It must never be forgotten, however, that while we can perhaps measure minimum equipment, there will always escape our mechanical instruments the prime essentials of the English teacher: the kindling imagination, the power of leadership, the personal tact, the idealism, without which all these things that can be measured and standardized are but as ashes in the mouth.

That is true; it is the sort of truth that makes people shudder at minimum-hounds and drill-masters. Ally yourself with it and thus gain golden opinions from all sorts of people. I have known spirited and gifted teachers to gain a poor reputation with their principals because they talked too much about essentials; I have known prosy persons to gain a charming reputation by centering their remarks on "self-expression" and "power."

The whole method of minimum essentials is new, experimental, and may not be all that I think it is. Don't elope with it. Remember that education must be conservative and that most notions about it are still in terms of what was commonly published ten or twenty years ago. Here are a few samples.

1. *The Course in English for* ———— outlines sixth-grade work thus: "Nothing in the way of technical grammar should be taught in this grade beyond (1) acquainting the child with the name and characteristic function of each of the parts of speech, and (2) giving him a clear understanding of what he has vaguely felt ('sentence sense') in the preceding years, namely, that in order that a group of words may be a sentence 'there must be something spoken about, and we must tell something about it.' " In other words, the major part of the essentials for which high schools labor, and which state universities do not find among their freshmen, is considered to have been conquered in the "nothing except" work of the sixth grade. A novice teaching in cities where this faith prevails ought to be cautious about making any reflections on it.

2. In the *Course for* ———— the pupils of grade 5A are expected to have "study and construction of the sentence, including the use of necessary marks of punctuation." So there would not be much left for a high-school teacher to do; she ought not to make any outcry about the eleventh-year students who have no sentence sense.

3. The *Course for* ———— does not discuss any matters lower than these abilities: "to write a letter which conveys a message directly and courteously, to compose on the first draft a clear and readable paragraph, to write an article with some vigor and personality of style." There is only one brief, vague section which hints that high-school teachers ought to moil with base syntax and the hobgoblins of spelling; hence a teacher in that state might be very indiscreet if she betrayed an interest in those low-thoughted concerns.

The three courses of study from which I quote are typical of what you would see if you went to Teachers College and investigated the contents of the hundreds of boxes of state

and city courses in the reference room. It has generally been taken for granted, both by practical and theoretical educators, that rudiments should be and could actually be mastered in the sixth or seventh year. Until very recently there has been little effort to distinguish the essentials and to advise special emphasis upon them. Our schools have taken all knowledge for their province and have assumed that complete culture is none too good for bright young Americans. A fair illustration is a certain course of study for a state which was compiled by a committee of five county superintendents and was used "in every state west of New Jersey." During a period of twenty-three years it was revised five times by a standing committee of county superintendents and normal-school professors. In the revision of 1912 teachers were told that reading for the first grade "must proceed on the basis of vigorous, genuine thinking on the part of the child"; they were advised for each month of every year above the second to teach "the difficult words of all lessons of the month in reading, language, and numbers"; in the first month of the third year they had to teach *adz*, *bade*, *bale*, *boll*, and *scent;* at the beginning of the fifth year pupils advanced to *isle*, *e'er*, *bate*, *borough*, and the words containing *ei* and *ie;* in the sixth year they learned "all the uses of the macron, of the breve, of the tilde"; in the directions for the seventh year the teacher found this goal: "The comma blunder should certainly be rooted out by the end of this year, for the work in analysis should help to give the feeling for the sentence. After this year no pupil should have to stop to think about such matters as periods, ordinary uses of commas, or quotation marks." When you read that, you will suspect me of garbling; you want to know what preparation the *Course of Study* made for eradicating the comma blunder so early. It made no preparation. The comma blunder, which nowadays baffles

the instructors in the University of Illinois, was not so much as mentioned through the first six years, is mentioned in only two sentences of the seventh-year advice, and is not mentioned thereafter. Look in the revision of 1918, under "Aims—Written" for the sixth year, and you will see how the superintendents had altered their instructions: "To *eliminate*—if the errors still persist—the habit of running two sentences together with no mark of punctuation or simply a comma between, and of writing parts of sentences (phrases and clauses) as sentences." The Committee on Revision italicized "eliminate," indicating that teachers must completely extirpate this childish blunder a year earlier than used to be required. When you try to understand the alteration, you should italicize "if the error still persists"; then you can see how the Committee is backing away from a comprehension of minimum essentials.

In the course of study for one state that I have not mentioned previously the only references to the sentence battle are these: "Fourth year—punctuation of the statement and question and the command; fifth year—correct punctuation of the classes of sentences, much dictation to teach recognition of complete sentences, punctuation of divided quotations and quotation within a quotation; sixth year—emphasize the sentence and the paragraph, teach pupil to make complete and smooth sentences, discuss clearness and give general rules; seventh year—the paragraph, the colon, the semicolon, parentheses, the order of the sentence; eighth year—use a great variety of sentences, strive for smooth, simple, and effective expression."

These few illustrations will show you, if you read them thoughtfully, how far the program of minimum essentials has been from the apprehensions of a majority of the directors of education in our states and cities. Most of them assume that of course such a rudiment as sentence

sense is merely a matter of review for the sixth year and that a teacher who is excited about a lack of commas in the high school must be a rabid devotee of drill and drive, without any soul for smooth and effective sentences.

B. What the Excitement Is All About

> And when you are thinking of Washington,
> Always remember the deeds he done.
> —Sara Gibson, Eighth Grade.

That couplet appeared recently in a Sunday newspaper, on a page of contributions from the schools of a thriving city. Sara had been incited to poetize and to communicate her thoughts effectively in smooth sentences. Perhaps she was benefited more by such inspiration than by mere drill on the past tense of *do*. We can guess that her teacher would sympathize with the woman who wrote for the Boston *Herald* some years ago, a woman noted for high ideals in pedagogy:

> In teaching the child I would pay little attention to composition. That is, I would not hamper him with rules and regulations. . . . My idea has always been to teach a child to express what he sees. . . . . If it is a bunch of daffodils that has given him happiness in their golden glory, let him tell in his story how they danced.

Certainly Sara's teacher would be commended by the compilers of a course of study for Blank City who gave this helpful opinion to guide novices: "The power to develop a 'writing conscience' seems to lie in the personality of the teacher. A teacher who is herself possessed of a fine literary taste will point out to her pupils apt and beautiful phrases and will fill them with a desire to express themselves in good form."

I shall not attempt to decide between the doctrine of apt phrases and the method of minimum essentials. I shall

only present facts, so that you may form your own judgment. It is a fact that during the last two decades most of the theory of composition has been based on the "fine literary taste of the teacher" and has been voiced in terms that are fairly represented by the following exhortation to ninth-year students: "Ornamentation is the decorative element that gives life, color, richness, and variety to our description. The fundamental device enables us to give unity to the handling of our material by using a single device throughout an entire paragraph of description. The minor devices, such as figures of speech, or allusions, give vividness to certain details." There is the first plain fact of this section.

As a second fact in my exhibit I will adduce the case of the Silver Star Boy, who was decorated by one private school for his proficiency in English and was recommended by a famous public school for excellence in composition. I was so much in awe of these certificates of ability that I trembled as I read the first ninth-year theme he wrote for me. It was three hundred words long, was divided into ten paragraphs, and gave a description of an imaginary tempest which "laid low the monarchs of the forest and left all the beasts dead in its wake." The boy showed no knowledge of what a sentence is, no ability to spell words like *their* and *too* and *didn't.* When he was questioned, he testified: "I have had no spelling for two years. I have studied no grammar for two years. The only definite way that I know of using a comma is to introduce a clause, as in 'The man, was down by the road.' " I offer no opinion about this case. I will only add that the boy's father, who was writing a book at the time, interrupted his labors to express his sorrows at the boy's mental and esthetic status.

Third fact: At a meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English I once heard a professor of English from a famous state university witness to the English conditions

in his state. He said not a word about ornamentation or grace or charm. He was bowed in grief and recounted cases like this: "In one school an expensive football coach was hired; he was required to do some teaching; but he did not know enough of any definite subject like algebra or history; so of course he was assigned to English. Such cases are not exceptional in my state." He was worrying about the ignorance of sentences prevalent among his freshmen.

Fourth fact: The chairman of the meeting at which he testified was the head of the English department at another great state university. He was the man who once declared in print: "Students who come to the college teacher from the secondary schools have been left in total ignorance of the nature of a sentence." He was a professor of literature. Why was he so small-minded as to care about sentence sense? Beware of making a hasty answer. Probably he was merely one of those university tyrants who wish high schools to do the dirty work of composition. He was doubtless a promoter of the "college domination" which you will hear so much about. I have never detected any of this tyranny though I have heard some inside talk at the colleges; but you will be wise to assume that it exists and to declare your independence of it. Reflect, however, that fifty-one per cent* of all high-school graduates go to college and that in some localities more than ninety per cent go; hence you would, in fairness, not entirely overlook some slight claims to attention that colleges may have.

Fifth fact: From the sadness of the college-section meeting I strolled down a corridor to a high-school section. Here all was calm joy in a discussion of teaching literature. Three times, in three different years and in three different cities, I have had that identical experience—of going from a college group that was agonizing over commas to a high-

*Estimate by A. H. Espenshade, March, 1924.

school group that was taking its ease with literature. Perhaps these occasions were mere coincidences.

Sixth fact: A woman in a large church college of the West once described in the *English Journal* how poor girls, well recommended by their schools, took jobs of scrubbing in order to pay for lessons in the elements of grammar, so that they might avoid being flunked out of freshman English. This is one of the most brutal revelations ever made of the shameless spirit of college domination and shows how soulless some women professors are.

Seventh fact: I quote from a cheery, hopeful article in a weekly journal issued by an eastern university, describing a new "awkward squad" in which freshmen were taught the sixth-grade rudiments: "There are about one hundred men entering ——— each year who are almost illiterate. They are ignorant of the fundamental rules of English grammar; they cannot spell; they do not recognize a sentence when they see one; to them a paragraph is a metaphysical subtlety past human understanding; and they regard punctuation, if they regard it at all, as a matter of meaningless rules or of individual caprice." Another eastern university reported, two years after this article was published, a squad of two hundred twenty-seven. Most American colleges now have a similar way of dealing with illiterate freshmen. This fact shows that the colleges have not been able to dominate the schools. Serves them right.

Eighth fact: The author of *How the French Boy Learns to Write* once dictated a simple paragraph of English narrative in several French schools and computed the percentage of mechanical errors made by these boys when writing a foreign language. Then he dictated the same paragraph in several American schools, to students of greater age, who were writing their native language. Arithmetic showed that the American students made eighteen times as many

errors as the French boys. Picture two pages of theme-writing: on one there are two errors marked, on the other thirty-six; the pages have different appearances. The difference is a curious fact. Some American educators have argued this case and have shown that we need not be alarmed by the difference in mere mechanics.

Ninth fact: The facts would stretch out to the crack of doom, but I will give only four more. Here is a small one from a recent number of the *English Leaflet:* "A pleasant and profitable meeting of the West of Boston English Club was held on December fifteenth in the library of the Newton Technical High School. After a social half hour of talk, sandwiches, doughnuts, cheese, and coffee the members discussed informally various questions. . . . 1. Grammar-school teachers, as well as we, are responsible for the present exaggerated emphasis upon fluency, interest, and cleverness at the expense of correct expression. . . . 4. The times are out of joint for developing literary taste. Many of our college candidates read of their own accord absolutely nothing." These teachers, shameful as it may seem to the maximalists, talked about "our drive for greater accuracy in spelling, punctuation, and sentence construction" and pleaded that "we cannot do it *all* in the high schools." If you will now close this book and your eyes, there will be in your inward eye an italicized *all.* Brood upon it. It will go far to explain why many practical high-school teachers—west of Boston or south of Chicago or east of San Francisco—are excited. Their excitement is a fact.

Tenth fact: This drab, commonplace exhibit is a sample taken at random from the mountain of dreary testimonies about the knowledge that high-school students have of rudiments of composition. Imagine yourself at a roll-top desk in a crowded corner of a crowded office-room in a crowded high-school building of a city somewhere in Amer-

ica. A tired, overworked little woman is talking—a strong little woman, whose eyes shine with the humor of taking precious time to tell the thousand-times-told tale that any experienced high-school teacher knows.

A majority of my tenth-year class this fall wrote whole paragraphs without dividing into sentences. I seldom find anyone in this class who can do the simplest childish exercise in dividing an unpunctuated paragraph into sentences—like "Two mountain lions had killed a horse they were having a fine meal." Here is a sample. I kept it because the girl complained at the office when I failed her for the first term; she tells me she was one of the best in her class at junior high school; I suppose she is one of those who "write more poorly in high school because of a discouraging teacher." See how discouraged she was.

"To the jagged peaks above for hours. I clawed my way upward through the loose rocks. I panted hard as I struggled up the steep slope at every step. I slipped my head was growing dizzy."

Grammar? Oh, in my tenth-year class I slave away at the constructions of words in sentences like—well, here are some I have been using:

"Mary is my sister."
"I went to the store."
"We are now in school."

Please don't tell anyone what I've been showing you—or, if you do, don't name the school. I want to keep my job here. It's rather fascinating to see what can be done. Sometimes I think I get results.

There are several thousand women like her, whose stories are all alike. If you suggest to them that "thought is more than correctness," they all have the same peculiar look in their eyes, a look as if—how shall I describe it?—as if they were social settlement workers listening to the queen who wanted the hungry rabble to be fed on cake.

Eleventh fact: I quote a brief sentence from a paper on "The Problem of Vocational English" read before the California Association of Teachers of English on April 21, 1923: "The number of illiterates who enter our colleges or go out into life armed with a high-school diploma is a direct arraignment of our boasted education."

Twelfth fact: It is also true that some high-school teachers do not arraign our education. One of them, a capable and witty woman in Albany, said in the *English Journal* for February, 1924: "A poor teacher delights in a minimum. It makes him feel efficient when he is least so. I move we drown him in an ideal deep. The good teacher will keep his head out." She makes me think of a Kansas teacher, one of the most successful in our profession, who said of herself, "The trouble with me is that my mind always runs to maxima." You will find that the teachers with whom you want to be classified tend to be maximalists. I submit that it is wise for every novice to provide herself with a maximal life-preserver, so that she will not be drowned in the ideal deep. But that is merely an opinion. The twelfth fact is that some people will consider you a poor teacher if you delight in minima.

C. What Some Excited People Do

You observe that I give the climactic position in the gamut of facts to a woman who seems unexcited. Probably she is just as much concerned as the teachers west of Boston, but is urging that we ought not to lose our heads in the crisis of illiteracy. Perhaps if she had eaten the Newton doughnuts, she would have understood the Newton resolutions and would have voted for them. I don't know what she would have done. I cite her as an example of people who tell us not to rely altogether on minima, not to delight in them. Surely

it is a reasonable warning, as reasonable as to tell people not to delight in war.

We do not declare war for pleasure, but from necessity. Thirty years ago there was no need of a war to make the world safe for rudiments; it was safe. Thirty years hence there will be no need of fighting on the side of minimum essentials; they will be victorious. But just now a war has been declared to preserve them; we are now engaged in battle; most practical teachers are excited about it; they have no time to dally with pacificists whose philosophy refers to all time and to general truths. Their sense of duty was voiced in a letter from Dr. Thomas C. Blaisdell, of a large normal school in Pennsylvania, who was president of the National Council of Teachers of English, who probably represented fairly the dominant sentiment of the Council, and whose judgment is said by Mr. Searson to show "a fine sense of relative values."

> Our freshmen enter with no "habit-knowledge" and no "habit-action" relative to the mechanics of speaking, writing, and spelling such as should have been mastered by the end of junior high school. High school has required the study of "classics" and five-sixths of the time given to English is given to that (with no results to speak of). . . . For ten years to come, high schools should teach mechanics of grades 6, 7, 8, and 9. During these ten years teachers should be trained so that they'll be able to develop "habit-action" in speech and accuracy and fix "habit-knowledge" in pupils before the end of junior high school work. Then high school and college will have a foundation on which to do high-school and college work.

That is not a philosophy of what English ought to be; it is a statement of what must be done in an emergency if we are to be saved. Ten pages farther on in the same issue of the *English Journal* from which I quote, but in a quite

different sort of article, is the judgment of a college teacher who describes his talk with a superintendent of schools. (He was not, by the way, trying to "dominate" the superintendent.)

> Recently a superintendent asked me to tell him in what respect I found the students lacking who came from his school. I told him, "Grammar, and the fundamentals of a sentence." Then he told me his side of the question. "I can get any number of teachers," he said, "who seem to enjoy telling a class 'Isn't this beautiful' and 'The author makes such wonderful descriptions,' or 'Tennyson was born in 1809 and died in 1892.' But I can't get teachers who *can* teach grammar and the fundamentals. Not even those from your college!" . . . Last September I spent three hours a week during the first term trying to teach something about sentence structure. . . . I did not blame the students, I pitied them; but what I thought of their teachers might damn them to everlasting punishment.

Those are violent words, perhaps injudicious. But this man is in a war. All the rest of his article shows that he has no wish to dominate school-teachers; he dreads minima, as he proves by talking about "vitalizing" and "library" and "teaching to think." He is fighting because he pities students who have been robbed of an education.

For fear that college outpourings may seem like suspicious propaganda, I will quote some school-teachers. I wish you might see the speakers, so that you could realize that they are neither valkyries nor plumbers, but healthy, normal people, who are animated in their classrooms and who have no delight in a minimum except as a life-saver.

I will begin with a Boston man, a very maximal sort of man, who spoke to the New England Association fifteen years before the horrid name of "Minimum Essentials," with its capital letters, was born; he spoke urbanely about

the pleasures of reading girls' themes. Yet even this man remarked: "To many a teacher it seems small business to be perpetually finding fault with trifles. But straws show which way the wind blows. . . . Toleration of slovenliness in these little details proclaims laxity in the whole intellectual outfit. Accuracy is a quality that pervades the character." Why should he be so serious and talk about so great a matter as character?

Move fifty miles west, to Worcester, and look at a Friday-afternoon meeting of English teachers who are listening (in 1902) to the nation's greatest psychologist, who exhorts them not to be so concerned about many things, but to "teach in the large" and to strive for "breadth" in education. "The great danger is," he tells them, "that those teachers who must be always on the watch for error will chill and repress, so that young people will be depressed, and education, instead of being a drawing out, will be rather a shutting up." If you had been a novice in that audience, you would have felt absolved from fussing with rudiments. If you had been a woman of experience, knowing what education is, you would have been warranted in trying to write a retort like "A Protest against 'Breadth' in Education," which was published as the *New England Leaflet* of October, 1902. In it a Worcester teacher said:

> Every summer the microscopic-minded woman teacher decides that September shall see more "breadth" and less detail in her teaching. But again the first week of school convinces her that insistence upon these details makes in a large degree for good habits—the righteousness that the public school may teach. . . . But "fluency" (heaven save the mark!) and slovenliness go hand in hand today. . . . Slovenliness is rampant and, it seems to me, will never be checked until a strong antidote is used. . . . Lectures "in the large" on the beauty of accuracy do not result in neat manuscripts. But the discipline of consequences makes

"I forgot" more and more rare. This is the same discipline that the world of affairs offers. Not to make the school atmosphere the atmosphere of life is pernicious. And the development of habitual practice of these virtues is, to quote an eminent authority, about as far as moral instruction in the schools can go.

She was not overwrought. She was reporting the fact that history has no record of clean themes produced in a whole class by teaching broadly in the large.

Are you suspicious of too much New England conscience in these witnesses? Do you picture them as old-fashioned reactionaries? Come west to Minnesota and listen to this young lady, who smiled when she said "relentlessly" in 1924:

> Is not drill the accompaniment of a militaristic, autocratic situation? I have heard of educators who believed that children should act only from an inner urge and that the teacher who commanded or even requested any other procedure was violating the sacredness of individuality. . . . Every child has a right to be brought up in such a manner that the use of good English is a habit by the time he has reached maturity. . . . Language accuracy is like good table manners or personal cleanliness. . . . Those practices which must become mechanical must be begun early and pursued relentlessly. . . . Do not misunderstand me. The things of the spirit *are* essential in the teaching cosmos, but they are not amenable to ordinance. Man does not live by bread alone, but he must have bread, and bakeries need regulation.

When she pleads "Do not misunderstand me," she shows you the danger that you will be misunderstood if you talk much about bread. Cake is a more popular diet to recommend for those who are educationally underfed.

Keep on westward to the Golden Gate, where everybody is progressive and makes fun of the slow old Boston region. You are hearing a paper on "Some Principles Underlying

Grading of Themes." The woman who reads appears to be rational.

Do not think me fanciful or straining at remote and far-fetched connections. In these solemn days we must search very deeply and test each deviation from rectitude to see where perchance may lie the tragic fault. Soon, I trust, we shall hear the last of the blatant boasting. . . . Then we shall try, I fancy, to rebuild our educational system on integrity, intellectual honesty, spiritual vision. . . . We have known a nation which has always been true to art, to intellectual integrity; which in its whole educational system has never tolerated slipshod approximations, but which has steadily maintained precision, exactness, and clearness of thought, accuracy of expression. . . . This is the burden our schools must bear in the democracy to which we strain, for which we are ready to sacrifice with the last full measure of devotion. . . . Grading thus imposes a sacred obligation, not because grades in themselves are vital, but because they represent a judgment, and judgments are dangerous when based on lies. . . . We must first determine a fair minimum requirement, which, at each stage of progress, must be held inviolate. . . . This inflexibility, this devotion to an imperishable ideal, works, not hardship, but blessing.

I can fancy that you are inclined to remark jocosely, as Dr. Johnson did about a solemn protest from some British colonies: "All this is very dreadful." You cannot believe that conditions are "tragic" or that the time is "solemn" or that a program of minima is a matter of "unswerving rectitude of thought." You are quite right in not believing, for nobody can ever inform you in print whether these excited people are right or wrong. This MINIMUM is a monster of frightful mien; when you have seen him often and grown familiar with his face and learned to endure him partially, you may begin to pity. Don't embrace—not yet awhile.

D. What Minima Are

You must be wondering, at any rate you ought to wonder, why there has been so much talk about minima before they are explained. This chapter began with a summary definition of the subject and has ever since been telling what people say about it. One reason for building the chapter by that plan is that people who exclaim against minima never think it worth while to discover what minima are; you ought to be familiar with that mode of discussing the subject. Another reason is that if the description had come first you would have found the subject dull, and you will be more interested if you know how much excitement lies under its leaden exterior. The casket of minima threatens rather than promises aught. I will now lift the cover.

You see before you a theme written by Jacob Roe on January 27, after four months of training in the tenth year. At the end of each of his past four years in school he has been recommended for promotion in English because he was said to know when he had reached the end of a sentence. On September 18 his teacher discovered by a little preliminary test that he, and most of his classmates, had no conception of when a sentence ends. Much less had he, or his classmates, any habit of marking the ends of such sentences as he did recognize. So the teacher had some prolonged drill in finding the subjects of verbs and in recognizing independent statements and in the use of black dots to show their termination. Jacob was not dull. He learned to do these sentence exercises well. On November 4 he stoutly asserted that his brain was capable of recognizing and marking sentences; and he proved his claim by correcting one of his themes and making every sentence proper. But on November 11 he made two improper sentences on

one page of a composition that he was required to proof-read carefully before handing it in. Fifteen others in a class of twenty-eight were equally careless. So the teacher inquired patiently whether they *wanted* to learn how to compose in sentences. They all agreed that they did. She patiently asked whether the recognition of their own sentences was too great a mental feat. They all shook their heads. She patiently inquired whether a ten-per-cent penalty for each sentence-error was too harsh a measure for training them to attend to this rudiment of composition. They thought it was mild. On December 9 she repeated an elaborate display of examples on the board, the explanation of the sentence-errors in the week's themes, and asked whether a twenty-per-cent penalty for each such fault in future would be too fierce. The class thought thirty per cent would not be unfair, but she hoped twenty per cent would suffice. The students had been entertaining her with lively descriptions of queer scenes and characters; she did not want to chill and repress them. After the Christmas vacation the percentage of sentence-errors increased, and she reluctantly advanced the penalty to thirty per cent. She was solicitous; she wished to keep well in the rear of the public opinion of her classroom society. "Is thirty per cent too much?" she asked. Jacob Roe gave a loud negative. On January 13, since improvement was very slight, she put the case to the class: "You are writing splendid themes; I'll match you against any division in the city. But you don't conquer the sentence-errors. I can't see that anything short of chopping off a theme's head is going to frighten the sentence-errors away and keep them away. Would it be best to start capital punishment and mark any theme failing in future if it contains one out-and-out sentence-error?" Jacob Roe, like all the rest, agreed that such a law was just. Now, on January 27, she finds a

sentence-error in Jacob's theme, in an excellent theme that is otherwise almost free from error. She keeps her contract with Jacob and marks him "failing." *That is Jacob's last sentence-error for three months.*

If you understand that one narrative, you know the inwardness of the whole mystery of Minimum Essentials. And if you will now listen to two remarks, you will understand the whole mystery of the battle of opinion.

First remark: Jacob takes home the excellent theme and shows it to his mother, who exclaims, "Your teacher says it's fine, but she marks it failing just because of one comma! She's perfectly horrid!"

Second remark: Jacob is talking with a friend: "Gosh, but Miss Marker knows how to teach. I've learned more'n I ever knew."

A book could be written about private systems of minima. Books have been compiled to set forth state systems. If I should digest some of this technical-looking material and show it here, it would appear intricate and might hinder your teaching. If the schools of your city have adopted a schedule of essentials, you will gradually learn it, under the direction of older teachers. If there is no schedule, be wary of adopting one for your own classes. If you are alone in a small school, don't try to build a schedule of your own in a year. Take your time and feel your way.

The process, whatever its details, will be essentially in steps like these:

1. You will not mark all sorts of errors and will not mark many kinds of errors early in the year.

2. You will first "drive" for uniformity in margins, indentions, titles, endorsements, etc. You will announce that failure in these perfectly plain requirements will be penalized leniently—say by taking off ten points the first week, fifteen the second, and so on.

3. As soon as students believe that they know how to spell *too* and *all right*, you will announce that these words are in a class by themselves, that any failure with them will cost, say, five per cent. Perhaps you will not pay attention to any other misspellings in the first set of themes. Public opinion will think you are comically mild and easy. Stimulate that opinion by very small penalties for a few select verb forms or idioms—very few. *Few* is always the word.

4. You will introduce friend Sentence-error and will inquire what mild penalty the class would suggest for any failure next week.

5. Now you are under way. There is no more to it than that. Your own discretion will steer you aright—no, think of it differently; think that these essentials *will steer you.* That is actually the feeling of a teacher who is working in the right way: What do these most frequent and most harmful errors compel me to do?

6. Most of your time and emphasis in class, when you are assigning themes or commenting on them, will be on general form, on life and interest. You will read Barry Dean's racy account of the leak in the roof that couldn't be found, and will express the hope that the girls can emulate next week some of Barry's zip and punch, which, as you have just proved by reading portions of his work aloud, are of more interest to the world than Amaryllis's discourse on all the materials and motions that go to the making of a cherry cobbler. You will hardly be able to control your laughter as you read from Ruth's story of the man who struggled with a peanut down his back—a capital theme, well worth one hundred per cent, but unfortunately securing only a mark of D because of carelessness with periods. It doesn't take many seconds to advertise this sad fact. Brevity is often the soul of impressiveness.

7. Your attack will always be against careless disregard of an admitted duty which is fully understood. Even the most lax and rosy maximalist admits that we must secure clean themes; the only dispute is about the way of securing. Every right-minded student admits that it is his duty to leave a margin, to spell *too* with two *o*'s, etc.; and if your teaching has been of the right sort, he must confess that failure in these minima is a careless disregard of his admitted duty. Until you secure that admission, you have no minima.

8. But you will never talk of any general principle of "duty." Students' minds will fasten on the concrete cases and understand them and acknowledge responsibility. Their minds will never be alive to any vague philosophy of responsibility.

9. Your own mind, on the contrary, will care little about any detail of minima. No one letter or comma or space is, in itself, worth a moment of your worry. A teacher who cares about the details, for themselves, is the odious and rabid devotee who brings the method into disrepute. Your program of minima is directed toward the one essential of preparation for life in a democracy: a sense of responsibility for doing things right.

I will conclude this section with three statements of what a program of minimum essentials is not.

1. It is not a fondness for mere "accuracy." That word, generally used by all who favor minima, has a curse upon it, for it naturally suggests a pedantic precision in the following of prim and silly rules. The minimalist is not thinking of any rules. He is thinking of a standard of decency, of accurately following the few basic requirements for responsibility in composition.

2. It is not a "repression" of ardent young souls who

long to commune with their fellows. What represses boys is a lot of worry about "communicating" and "motivating" and "ornamenting." The teacher who has an animated mind is unconsciously full of motive power, and rejoices in originality, and shows students how to shake off the load of ignorance that oppresses them.

3. It is not a love of militarism in pedagogy. When a sympathetic teacher sees the bondage of the ignorance of students, he is full of pity and indignation; he rouses himself to action; he plunges into a war of liberation. I have yet to hear or read a plea for minima that did not turn insensibly to a metaphor of battle, of fighting against the legions of illiteracy. If this be militarism, make the most of it.

E. How Minima Grew Up

Since the method of Minimum Essentials (with the capitals) is a new thing in the world, still in an experimental stage, it might not seem advisable to speak so confidently of them in this chapter. Hence it is in order to describe how they originated. By their roots we shall know them.

I pull down the first four volumes of the *English Journal*, 1912 through 1915, the years previous to the time when I wrote the first edition of *What Is English?* It is a curious feeling to be turning again these pages that came to me month by month in that remote age when I had never seen any other pedagogical journal and had no thought of venturing to print opinions about teaching English. How vividly I recall some of the feelings of wonderment or dismay or satisfaction as I glance again at articles unseen for a dozen years. In 1912 I discover no reference to "minimum"; the burden of the contributions is that oral composition is the star of hope, that college domination must cease.

In October of 1913 is a well-remembered article by Percy W. Long, who had for several years been developing a way of grading themes at Harvard, Radcliffe, and Wellesley: "Grades That Explain Themselves." Its tone and purport are of a maximal sort; it deals with the somewhat literary tasks set for college themes; and it does not use the word for which I am seeking. But the whole philosophy of minima is in it—yes, fully bodied forth in this one sentence: "Then, too, there are errors toward which—once they have been thoroughly explained—the teacher must maintain an attitude of scorn: such are errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation." There it is, that same "scorn" which motivates theme-readers in France and Slippery Rock and west of Boston. Professor Long found that he had to enforce the decencies, else he would have been false to himself, to Wellesley girls, and to the honesty of education. He made grades explain themselves by the very simple device of registering two judgments about each theme. First he judged the content and structure, marking A or B or C; then, if there was a deficiency in mechanics, he put a large check after the letter—B √. To show the kind of failure in mechanics he added a letter: B√p meant "This is a theme of good quality; but unfortunately the punctuation is below high-school standard, and the theme is therefore a failure." If the writer, within a reasonable time, taught herself punctuation and thereafter used her knowledge accurately in her themes, the checks were excused and had no bearing on her year's mark. If she could not or would not punctuate her themes, nothing but the checks counted; she was conditioned. There is the principle that all theme-readers come to if they insist on decent form. The principle has been expressed in a hundred forms, often by people who thunderously deny that they are following it. The most common form of denial

is "I refuse to accept a theme that is careless in mechanics." But that is essentially the same judgment that Long made. It is the principle of not crediting advanced work unless it shows mastery of the essentials of elementary work.

Note well the wrong inference that is often drawn from the fact that some college girls can train themselves out of mechanical errors. It is to be observed that many of them cannot do so. It is to be noted that the average high-school student can by no means do so. The belief that any mode of "appeal to pride" can abolish minimal errors in high school has no foundation, except for the few students at the very top of the class.

The next description of a method of minima that I find is in November, 1914, by Miss C. I. Orr, of the Central High School, Washington, D. C., an article of which I have no recollection and which I had not seen when I wrote the preceding part of this chapter. Miss Orr describes in a spirited and entertaining way how she was driven to "A Revolt" against the perpetual correction of the same old childish errors. She was impelled, just as Professor Long was, by an intolerable condition, to a course of action that was a revolution in her whole method, and that came to her *independently*. She thus describes the revolt when, "on that memorable November night," a set of themes contained the same hundreds of the same old illiterate blunders and she "laid down, in revolt," her red-ink fountain-pen:

> Now I was going to hold them responsible for the principles they had been faithfully taught year after year. . . . They did not seem cast down [not "repressed," you see], but looked interested. . . . They agreed that they could advance no sound argument to show the injustice of demanding the careful application of such principles which they had just carefully reviewed and of marking with severity neglect of them. Making them feel, accord-

ing to the semester, the degree of responsibility resting with them. . . . I feel that my pupils are at last beginning to assume an attitude of armed hostility . . . whereas hitherto they had been non-combatants in the conflict.

Miss Orr is like all the rest—talking about hostility and warfare, seeming almost "rabid," in a mood to "drive." She secured results and made students feel "Gee! she knows how to teach." But she did not use the term "minimum."

The first occurrence of that word which I can find is in "Effort *vs.* Accomplishment," by Miss Florence Y. Humphries, of Palo Alto, December, 1914.

In all seriousness let us ask ourselves the question: "Is it not possible that, to a much more dangerous extent than has been imagined, the failure of schools to "make good" is due to this emasculation of standard?" . . . Now, since the colleges, business men, society in general, and Mr. Edward W. Bok in particular witness with united voice that we do not give students sufficient equipment for life, it behooves us to seek the cause and the remedy. . . . If we maintained with steadiness what we know to be at least a minimum standard; if we consistently refused to call black white, or even gray; if we insisted on achievement as proof of effort, would the public have so much reason to complain that those who leave us are illiterate?

Miss Humphries' sense of duty to democracy impelled her, *independently*, to a method that she would never have conceived if she had not encountered the facts of school life.

Six months later the method of essentials was fully formulated by G. F. Reynolds, then a professor at the University of Montana and actively interested in the efforts of the English teachers of the state to secure better results. Can you detect in the following extracts anything like the tone of a man who wants to "oppress young souls" or who forgets that "the body is more than raiment"?

Guess at his personality while you read and judge whether Joe Jones would prefer him or some "motivating" teacher. I have often quoted the second and third sentences, which are a wellspring of truth.

We muddle over the same old subjects in college freshman English that the students have been muddling over ever since the sixth grade; and the orthodox requirement of accuracy in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure is repeated unblushingly for every class in the high school, for every class in the university or college, and even then—so we are told—is never attained. . . . The report of the Committee on English for the Elementary Grades, as presented at the National Education Association, in St. Paul, showed at once that it was formulating an ideal rather than an irreducible minimum of achievement. It actually sets down more for the sixth grade to accomplish than the colleges ask, and do not secure, from their entering students. . . . I know as well as anybody that English is not merely a matter of chasing stray commas; it is training in character, in imagination, in spiritual qualities. . . . Nothing is more noticeable in recent publications than the way in which every subject is attempting to develop the "soul" of the child and to enlist his interest. . . . Is not the best way to train a boy's soul and character to give him a necessary task and see that he does it; and is not the way to enlist his interest to make that task definite, precise, tangible? I believe as much as anybody that English should be vital, interesting, stimulating, but it will be only the veriest twaddle if it is not based on the accomplishment of a definite, precisely realized purpose. Such an achievement becomes more possible if we formulate a minimum, an irreducible standard.

In 1914 the Montana State Council of Teachers of English appointed a committee of five—two high-school teachers, two principals, and a university professor—to report on "a minimum standard." The committee recommended

that, as a tentative guide, answers should be found to the following questions:

1. Spelling: what words? what rules?
2. Diction: what usages to be drilled upon?
3. What mistakes in grammar? how much theoretical grammar?
4. What uses of punctuation are to be taught?
5. How much theoretical rhetoric?

"Minimum" was used with "standard" during 1914 and 1915, but the first occurrence of it that I find as a modifier of "essentials" was in April, 1916. At a meeting of the Inland Empire Council in Spokane Miss Ethel E. Redfield "gave a suggestive statement of minimum essentials for the grades."

The Montana Council had announced the whole program and made an index to what must be done before a body of teachers could appropriate a new method and coöperate in applying it. No more than a beginning of a solution has been reached after the succeeding ten years of the labors of many committees in many states and cities. All that I have tried to say in previous chapters might be summarized as an effort to sort out from the bewildering mass of details those few which are most essential in numbers 1, 3, and 4 of the Montana list. In later chapters I shall make the same efforts for numbers 2 and 5. Until a teacher has decided what minima deserve the extreme emphasis, he is not within hailing distance of maxima; all his labor is a struggle up a sandy slope, which continually slides him back to where he started. If he would climb a mile, he must first find some contrivance by which he can climb one foot—*and stay there.* The device is a mere despicable minimum, but it is essential to progress. Hence the term, which became so common by 1920, "Minimum Essentials."

F. The "Mastery" Idea

You observe that minimum essentials have arisen from the struggles of actual teachers with the actual facts of school life. For fear you might think that these teachers are therefore a narrow and biased lot, I will indicate how the more detached students of education are approaching the same method. In December, 1922, H. L. Miller and Dorothy Johnson, of the High School of the University of Wisconsin, published in the *School Review* an article called "Directing Study for Mastery." This is not couched in home-like teacher parlance of "marking with severity," but in more attractive terms: "The purpose of this study of the teaching process is to present briefly a plan of organization and procedure. . . . We have attempted to transcend the movement for minimum essentials of content." There is charm in that "transcending." You will find that "mastery" is a much more alluring name than "minimum." The scholarly terminology of the article, however, sometimes lapses into teacherish phrases, such as "the drive"; the authors say that their drive is toward "individual mastery." The details of the article are not quotable, because the illustrations of "mastery" are taken from geometry and French; but the principle is exactly what we teachers of English know as minimum requirements. There are "challenges" to mastery; each challenge is in three "blocks"; the first block contains "the essential processes"; and these are an irreducible minimum, demanded of all students alike, demanded in completeness, in habitual mastery. "There is no fair or good mastery of material [that is, the elementary processes]; it must be mastered in its completeness." That is what mere teachers of English are trying to do with such materials as the spelling of a few hundred words and the forming of correct sentences.

In the *New Republic* for November 12, 1924, is an article describing what minimum essentials mean to a progressive (perhaps an almost radical), forward-looking superintendent nowadays. C. W. Washburne, of the Winnetka, Illinois, schools, tells us: "A child may take as much time as he needs to master a unit of the common essentials, but master it he must. . . . To allow children to pass through school with hazy and inadequate grasp of essentials is to fail in one of the functions of the school." One-half of the child's day is given to "self-expression" and "group activities"; the other half to his study of the rudiments. "If the pupil finds that he has mastered a group of essentials, that his practice test is one hundred per cent right, he asks the teacher for a real test. If the real test is not one hundred per cent, the child practices again."

G. Samples of Published Minima

The list of minimum requirements first adopted by the Illinois Association was only four pages long, and two-thirds of this space was taken up with "reasonable" requirements. The minima for the ninth year were: indention, margins, periods, question marks, capitals for sentences and proper names, avoidance of the two kinds of sentence-errors, correct spelling of twenty words, proper divisions of words at ends of lines. The requirements for the tenth year were the "reasonable" requirements of the ninth year plus: capitals for nouns and adjectives of language and race, quotation marks, paragraphing of conversation.

At once you offer criticisms—or you should. The poorest ninth-grade pupil who deserves promotion should be able to spell more than twenty demons; there cannot be even minimal composition in the ninth year without those quotation marks which are commonly taught in the sixth year.

Yet if you had served on the committee that drafted the list, you would have heard these objections raised and would perhaps have voted against them. The Illinois Association avoided the fault that is common to almost all lists—including too much. The merit of a list is not the particular items that appear, but the forcible calling of attention to the fact that *at least* something should be mastered. That is the prime secret of success. A committee of novices would always be maximal, would always be worried about the vast number of essentials that are omitted. If minima are to succeed, they must be minimal in quantity. Their effect depends upon inciting teachers and pupils to try to master *something*.

Even in this shortest of published lists there is a maximal item—proper division of words at the ends of lines. That is a highly technical matter which few teachers know much about. The case is illuminating. In these early days of trial it is not likely that any report on minima has altogether excluded maxima. The great work that lies ahead of us is to find out what must be included and what excluded.

The next list that I will speak of is *Minimum Requirements in the Mechanics of English Composition for Use in the High Schools of the Inland Empire*, a forty-four page pamphlet that may be had by sending fifteen cents to the *Inter-Mountain Educator*, Missoula, Montana. The "Inland Empire" is the group of the four northwestern states of the country. It was served for several years by diligent committees which slaved in a good cause, working with questionnaires, thrashing out opinions, codifying what came through their mill, making preliminary reports for criticism, and publishing a final draft in 1920. This was the first and greatest effort of its kind, a sort of Magna Charta

of minima. You will find it specially useful for its discussions and platforms of principles. It dared to be truly minimal—for one example, by formally excluding the *shall* and *will* bogy. It contains only a few items that could be classed as maximal—for example, "write our common compound words solid."

The latest and safest guide at the time I write this chapter is a hundred-page pamphlet, *The High School Curriculum, Bulletin No. 2*, issued by the State Department of Education of Minnesota. A copy may be had for twenty-five cents from the Syndicate Printing Company, Minneapolis. The committee which drafted the Bulletin consisted of two high-school teachers, one high-school principal, and two city superintendents. I wonder if you will shudder at this sentence on page 10: "During the last three months of the year *any* composition in which *any* point of the minimum list is missed should be marked a failure." When I advised that sort of treatment in 1916, I innocently supposed that I was describing a normal and humane way of judging themes, but soon learned that many tender-hearted people thought me a brute. Now for two years they have had to consider the State of Minnesota a brute. But teachers everywhere will go smiling on to victory by this road of real kindness and helpfulness.

A few bits in the Minnesota *Bulletin* seem to me ill-advised: the gender of nouns, fifteen symbols for correcting composition, *The Tempest* in the tenth year, the pronunciation of *pumpkin*. But in general the choice of items and the advice to teachers are admirable, making the way easy for all future compilers of minima. Especially useful to novices are the plans for the course in literature and the lists of books for home reading—the two matters which cause most inquiry from teachers.

H. The Program of Minima Is a Necessity

The method of minimum essentials (with small letters) is as ancient and well based as any teaching of composition. It is not a fad or an experiment or a novel hope. Before there was any such curricular subject as "English," teachers indignantly refused to receive sloppy themes, and knew that any attempt to condone heedlessness was an injury to pupils. The modern name and the formulation of lists are simply ways of defining and agreeing upon the particulars in a method that is older than Greece. The first two sections of this chapter do not prove that the method of minima is dubious, but only that it may be bad policy for a novice in a sentimental age to proclaim allegiance to it. You should proclaim nothing. You should not espouse Mr. Minimum (with the capital) until there has been a long courtship. But this last section of the chapter will show that if you reject him you will condemn yourself to a life of prettified nothingness.

"The art of writing," said the University of Wisconsin in its advice to teachers issued in 1913, "consists of a higher part (style, grace, effectiveness, power) and a lower part (spelling, punctuation, idiom). The higher part is not included in the amount of proficiency required for admission to freshman English." That statement is essentially the judgment of all universities and colleges. If you fear that the verdict is an attempt to dominate your high school, be assured that it is also the judgment of the business and the professional world, of any part of life which your students are to enter. It is real life which says to you what the universities phrase thus: "Students who possess literary skill are not qualified if they are seriously deficient in the rudiments." The world has been rather good-natured about the boys and girls who are deficient in rudiments,

but is rapidly growing more stern; we teachers must heed its ultimatum demanding that we teach minima.

That statement about heeding an ultimatum seems to contradict what I said early in the chapter, that "it will be good policy for you not to express any sympathy with minimum essentials." It does contradict. The fault is not in me, but in the diverse opinions of this changing period. I have tried to describe these opposite theories, so that you may understand the swirling currents in which you find yourself and may be able to slip safely between the minimal Scylla and the maximal Charybdis.

If you find "the world" a rather vague force, think of the judgment of students. "Students," says the University of Wyoming in a *Bulletin* of 1924, "are the first to resent deficiencies in their preparation, and to clamor against their high-school courses in English." You may be sure that your students who go directly from school into their struggle with the world will clamor against you if you leave them deficient in minima.

True, there has been in the twentieth century the academic theory that rudiments may be taught incidentally, a theory which you must not disclaim or contemn if you are a novice in a school that has a leaning to it. It was thus expressed by a man who reviewed the first edition of *What Is English?* for the *Nation:* "Some of the difficulties against which Mr. Ward urges concentration of all available resources may be more easily overcome by a flank attack or a series of well-planned raids. If a student, through the awakening of his mind by reading, or through other influences, can be induced to take an interest in expressing his own ideas, these minor essentials will easily and quickly be added to his equipment." The answer came in a letter to the *Nation* from a practical teacher of freshmen at Wabash College, Harold H. Hawk, who said that

the attitude of the reviewer toward essentials "is found ruinously often among teachers of the English language in high schools and colleges." He testified:

> For four years, as instructor in composition in a Middle Western college for men, I have been leading bombing parties, flank attacks, and "well-planned raids" against intrenched *seperate*'s, *sophmore*'s, *alright*'s, dangling participles, comma splices, and all the rest of the nefarious legions. And my conclusion is that the difficulties that the "mechanics" of English offer to high-school students as well as to freshmen in college can be overcome in no such manner, however well planned the raids or however numerous the grenades. What is needed most, most of all in high school, is a concentrated offensive in which all of one's reserves are actively engaged to defeat habits of slovenliness.

Whenever anybody tells you that "these minor essentials" will be acquired incidentally by any average student if he has "an interest in expressing his own ideas," you may know that he is dreaming on Lethe wharf and talking in his sleep. His words have no relation to the facts of school life. His strategy for actual twentieth-century soldiers of school English is like using a trireme against modern coast-defenses; a big rowboat was once upon a time a reality of warfare; it is now a picture in a book. These words will seem less fierce to you after you have read the next chapter.

My estimate of the opinion of an old-fashioned gentleman may give a wrong impression by seeming intemperate. Turn from my estimate to that of a woman who has grown with her age, lived with it, loved it, helped it. In Omaha they call her name blessed. Her own pleasure is in teaching literature, and her most successful class is composed of some chosen seniors who gain an insight into poetry by making verses under her direction. She is one of the most

maximal teachers in the United States, both by instinct and practice. Yet she learned more quickly than I did how to use minima. She learned it, as we all did a quarter of a century ago, quite *independently*. She had never heard of minima, any more than the rest of us had. She simply adapted her work to the children that were in her classes. She learned gradually, with the same amazement and distrust which we all used to feel when we worked in our own corners, that some rudiments were almost unteachable and were basically necessary—essential to progress toward maxima. So she learned to put more and more emphasis on them, and then more, and more. At length she reached the method we all reached: marking *any* theme a failure for *any one* violation of certain specified minima. In 1921 she put the requirements, gradually worked out in collaboration with a corps of teachers, into *A Style Book*, dedicated "to all freshmen" and asserting to them that "it contains matter pleasant for the alert and painstaking." There is no question that it has been pleasant for them, and very useful, and utterly necessary as a life-saver for all students who will not be alert or painstaking without the "Minimum Essentials" of the Omaha method. If you suggested to her that "these minor essentials will easily and quickly be added," she would not speak loud words about triremes. She would smile and smile, and not think you worth answering.

I wonder what Sister Angelita would think of the gentleman of the old school who talks about "easily and quickly adding," if he came to our village and visited her school and reproved her for making such prolonged and insistent labor to secure clean themes from children. I can guess that her thought would be something like this: "I should be a traitor to childhood if I relaxed my efforts for these essential minima."

CHAPTER XI

WHAT IS THEME VALUE?

The answer to the question that entitles this chapter is a corollary to the chapter on minimum essentials. I think the question could be satisfactorily answered in three paragraphs of moderate length, and I should prefer to dismiss the subject as briefly as that; for the concise statement would be more clean-cut. Perhaps discussion will cause an uneasiness which it is not necessary to rouse. But if I avoid the explanations which follow, you will shortly be encountering a rabble of queer ideas about theme value and will accuse me of laziness if I give you no account of the theories that surround you and make faces at you. Don't regard this chapter as a revelation of what theme value is, but as a mosquito-net against a swarm of perplexities.

Nobody knows what a school theme is. In the good old days before our Civil War a theme was commonly an essay on an abstract topic, an exercise in reasoning; later it was conceived as "an expression of individuality"; nowadays it is often called "your story for this week." Academic circles ordinarily assume that a theme is a species of literary exercise in which the average pupil can never deserve a perfect mark because he does not possess literary talent. They think of a theme as an outlet for a reservoir of pent-up feeling that longs to "communicate" itself to fellow beings. Teachers often fail to find any floods of emotion and become so much engaged with tunneling through illiteracy that they come to think of a theme as an exercise in spelling and punctuation.

I will approach this babel of opinions by way of two ideas which are seldom referred to and may not signify much, but which have been useful to me.

1. "What do you suppose this theme-writing is all about?" a friend once asked me. I replied that of course nobody knew, but that, more than any of us suspect, the making of a theme is a training in reading. It is true in every art or pastime that I can appreciate other people's performances very much better if I have done a little performing myself, in however amateurish a way. If I have never stood at the plate to bat or drawn a bow across violin-strings or sketched a landscape, I am unable to see and hear well at a ball game or a concert or a gallery of paintings. If I have made some verses, the reading of Browning is a much more profitable occupation than if I have never made verses. Let me be a writer of descriptions or editorials in an English class, and I become a different sort of reader of prose made by professionals; I can have more pleasure, shall be less deceived by sophistry. Ability to appraise a printed page is one of the prime requisites of a democracy. Theme-writing can increase that ability.

2. I have several times asked literal-minded college boys what they got out of a course in their junior year called "focusing of daily impressions." That seems unrelated to the demands of a workaday world; it is suggestive of literary crochet-work; and I have wondered what led boys to elect it and what their judgment of it was. They cannot answer me with an analysis, but testify that "Oh, somehow it did me a lot of good." The answer, clumsy as it sounds, is legitimate and must apply to much of the work that we do in school without knowing precisely why. Somehow or other the making of themes improves the mind. A teacher can observe that this is a fact. Why worry about the reason for the fact?

I will now show you a bird's-eye view of the conception that is most widespread and most powerful.

A. The Grand Literary Tradition

We must rise above the high-school level, above the level of "composition courses" in American colleges, and soar in the pure serene of that intellectual life that was lived at Oxford in the days of the *Spectator Papers.* For only in those old days and classical surroundings can The Grand Literary Tradition be seen unveiled and in the light of day. (Bear in mind that I am not making a historical excursus for fun; I am going to show you a source of perplexity for teachers in junior high schools.) The business of education at Oxford and Cambridge was to train men in the perfection of classical scholarship, so that they could compose their thoughts in Latin and write impeccable Greek strophes and perceive the qualities of literary style at its highest and most beautiful. All the gentlemen at Christ Church or Magdalen had been nurtured in homes of refinement, had been trained from childhood in the exactitudes of scholarship, had been accustomed to good reading as a matter of social necessity. Vocabularies came to them with their mothers' milk, and a sense of style was bred in them during every recitation of exacting translation into idiomatic English. As schoolboys they spoke with refined accents, in full consciousness of sentence values; as readers for university honors they absorbed a sense of coherence and just proportions in literary masterpieces. All such rudiments as sentence variation and paragraph structure were an A, B, C that need not be mentioned, for they were part of the stuff of daily education.

Conceive, then, what "composition" meant to an Oxford undergraduate. It did not mean a course in what we call

rhetoric, any more than a modern American college would provide a course in the interpretation of movie dramas. There was not—and there is not now—any "course" in composition at Oxford. If an ambitious undergraduate felt the impulse to creative effort, he wrote his essay and submitted it for criticism. It was a private venture, by a talented young man, with a literary purpose. The tutor who read the composition criticized it in terms of its literary effectiveness; he offered counsel about lack of unity, involution of thought, failures in emphasis. Especially he made strictures upon failures to be precise and elegant in the choice of words.

Composition at American colleges during the eighteenth century was based on just such a conception: the effort of a thoroughly educated man of talent who needed to have his style refined. Do you see the full implication? This college writer already had a style that was based on wide reading; he had ideas, probably of a bookish sort; and he felt an urge to express himself. All that he needed further was a *refining*. The books of rhetoric for his improvement were treatises upon the refinement of an art, written by scholars for ambitious young scholars. All discussion was based on the choicest and severest of literary models. Collegiate theme-writers aspired to literary excellence as spontaneously as a back-lot ball-player now aspires to a major league. A rhetoric pointed out those niceties of contrivance by which the masters had been effective. Especially it called attention to niceties of diction by which style could be freed from every taint of barbarism and be made to shine in purity and refinement.

You will now have difficulty in seeing how these ancient glories could influence the hard American facts of 1900. You will remain quite incredulous unless you can understand the most important element in textbook-making.

It is this: authors must follow authority. If they do not say about what their predecessors have said, they will be considered unsafe; if they drop to a lower plane, they will be considered unworthy. What is more, they are detached from the changes going on in a base, inartistic world, and act as upholders of old excellence. A study of rhetorics from 1850 to the present would show an unbroken succession of the appeal to skilful adventurers in literary enterprises. Reflect upon the following examples, all less than fifteen years old. It is easy to find extreme and laughable passages, but I choose excerpts that are quite commonplace and that boys and girls can understand. The first one represents the Literary Tradition pure and simple, because a class in an American high school cannot choose audiences, but the literary adventurer must.

> First of all, a writer should decide what he wishes to say. This he cannot discover unless he knows the people whom he is addressing, his audience. He should try to find out how much interest they have in the subject and how well educated they are. . . . For what audience was *Ivanhoe* written? The *Iliad?* The *Biglow Papers? David Copperfield?*

The modern American schoolboy does not sin by lugging in gallicisms and Elizabethan idioms, but the literary adventurers will unless they are taught better. Hence our textbooks still rehearse:

> A person must avoid barbarisms, such as foreign terms not incorporated into the language, and obsolete words, which were once, but are no longer, a part of the language.

No journalist who had investigated modern youth would ever think of accusing them of unconsciously imitating the style of masterpieces, but bookish people have always

been prone to do that. Hence the most recent book I have seen still repeats the Grand Tradition:

> If we read books thoughtfully, we gradually learn through unconscious imitation to improve our own writing. . . . Books are like people in their influence over us. . . . If we read books written in a pleasing style and filled with life and personality, our own manner of writing will necessarily be improved.

You have seen what composition used to be—actually was in very sooth—before 1850. You have seen that this Tradition was embodied in textbooks which still repeated rather truthfully what was wanted in colleges. You have dimly seen how this kind of treatment set the tone for succeeding texts in the nineteenth century and how, in spite of surface alterations and appeals to modern life, the fundamental assumption of the most recent texts is still that a literary impulse is at work. And you may during the next year of your teaching observe for yourself to what extent the assumption is an antique fiction. Thus you are in the way to remove one perplexity from your mind when you hear preachments about what theme value is.

B. The Relation of Literature to Composition

Another perplexity may disappear when you set squarely before yourself the fact (which is certainly not news to you) that a generation ago the secondary schools of our country were few in number, were largely engaged in preparing for college, and contained a select lot of students who desired, or at least would so pretend, to model their style on the classics. In these and in other ways that you know all too painfully the present generation is different. It is impatient of the charming theory that boys and girls are

animated by an urge to literary excellence. I think that the Universities of Wisconsin and Illinois have not exaggerated the smallness of such an ambition, the smallness of the effect of literature on high-school style.

Yet there is a relation between modern literature and school composition, as the briefest references will show: average boys often prove by the way they open narratives that they have unconsciously absorbed a knack from their reading of magazine fiction; if I read *Captains Courageous* aloud and require average eighth-grade boys to reproduce limited episodes as themes, they like the work and learn much about structure and proportion; testimonies from everywhere prove that upper-class students can learn much about essay forms from imitation of models; there can be no question that many teachers have increased and vitalized vocabularies by skilful work with classics read in school. Under the leadership of a teacher who inspires confidence there can be an effect of literature upon themes in the most ultra-modern community.

This, however, is very different from what our books and orators imply. It is either an effect upon the chosen few students or an effect induced by a teacher's application. Literature will not, of itself, by mere contact with student readers, produce any discernible result upon the bulk of your classes. The facts are obvious enough, and I should never have thought of setting them down here if I had not learned that many teachers lose ground by artlessly accepting a mere theory that arose in an antique and bookish age.

C. A Theme Is Not a Piece of Literature

As soon as you have seen the title of this section, you retort that a theme *is* a piece of literature. And so it is. Every child has an individuality and can to some extent

express it in a way peculiar to him alone—and that may be called a species of literature. The pro and the con are too plain to furnish a debate between people whose only interest is to gain a clear notion of theme value. The title means what Dr. Lyman of the University of Chicago meant once in an address when he exclaimed with deep feeling, "We can't make artists out of our young people. We ought not to try." The statement could be disputed by a quarrelsome person, but the plain meaning is generally accepted by common-sense people, *and is forgotten by exhorters.*

What I am calling attention to in this section is the tag-end of the Literary Tradition, the remnant of the theory that a theme is an individual enterprise, undertaken because of an inward compulsion, built with an eagerness for excellence, and built by a writer who is well educated and emulous of fame. Few would admit nowadays that they hold such a theory. Recent textbooks begin by disclaiming it and announcing that "we are not trying to make artists." But this chapter is about the perplexities caused by generous, uplifting people who preach to us English teachers and confound us. Such people are, quite unconsciously, permeated with the sentimental feeling that a theme is a product of ambitious talent—a piece of literature. And the idea has some validity. Many an experienced teacher knows how to use it with vitalizing results in classes.

I am talking about novices who are in a quandary. They must require a theme from each student, on or before a certain minute, written about a specified subject in a way that is, at least partially, prescribed. These are tasks imposed, not spontaneous gushings-forth. Much can be done to adapt the topics to the actual emotions of students and to incite them to a desire to write; clever teachers sometimes do wonders in this way. But the average novice

in the ordinary school, if he trusts to these forms of inspiration, will crash against a twentieth-century fact. Boys, he will find, are grudgingly doing a job, and girls are not fired with ingenuity. The amount of original and spontaneous composition is small enough in the most enthusiastic class, and is smaller still in many a class that is doing very profitable work in composition. The "literary element" is variable and subjective.

The element that is unchangeable and objective in every decent class is the demand for good form. Whatever else it may be, a creditable theme is always an exercise in applying what has been learned about good form. But a piece of literature may be perfectly charming, even worth money to a publisher, if it completely violates everything that a class has learned about punctuation and spelling. In this sense it must be true that a theme is not a piece of literature.

D. Penalizing the Lack of Literary Skill

You must now grapple with an assumption which seems an axiom to a majority of theme-readers, which may be true, but which is debatable and must be looked at on both sides by anyone who wants to know what theme value is. Imagine that you hold in your hand two themes, that both show good structure, that neither contains any mechanical errors; the first is flat and prosy, showing not a spark of originality; the second is written with charm and vivacity. If they came to an editor's desk, the first would be quite worthless for publication, and the second is worth purchasing. To an editor the difference is infinite —not simply a difference between sixty per cent and eighty per cent, but between zero and eighty per cent. What about them on a teacher's desk? The very general assumption is

that the second theme must receive a higher mark. Most theme-readers are aghast at the mere raising of the question of relative values. If you ask them to consider in cold blood, as a mere scientific speculation, whether the two themes might not be of equal value for a school-teacher, they will be indignant. Their blood will not remain cold, but boils. You might as well ask a banker whether a dollar bill is not worth as much as a five-dollar bill.

Don't let your temperature rise one degree. Keep calm. You are not going to be asked to change any axiom on which your convictions rest. You are simply advised, for your future peace of mind, to look on the other side of your convictions for a few minutes. As this year goes by, and the next and the next, while you gain familiarity with school composition and the aims of education, keep walking around your axiom and taking stock of it. You will work with more equanimity if you are not blindfolded.

Step over here to another subject, drawing, where your prejudices are not enlisted, and see what you make of it. I never had any skill in drawing. Apparently my eyes do not really see outlines or shadows, and there seems to be no inward urge which impels my fingers to trace lines representing the faces and trees that I see. Many of the boys I teach have such an urge, a strong one; they are forever adventuring with pencils on paper or with crayon on the blackboard, making caricatures of teachers, depicting animated scenes with a few clever strokes. I envy them. I perceive that they were born with a gift which I lack. Of course I could be trained to a certain extent; I could slowly learn the mechanics of shade and perspective and could be taught to sketch after a fashion. In an anatomy class I once drew a parietal bone well enough to earn praise from the instructor, and the proud tingle of that moment is still pleasant in my memory. But the best I could ever

accomplish would be stiff and false compared with any carefree effort of a boy who was born to draw. In me there is no innate power with penciled lines; in him a creative impulse is at work. Suppose that I am a high-school student and that my lack of skill is the average of ability in the ninth year; suppose drawing is made the most important subject in the curriculum; suppose that a drawing-teacher compares one of my uninspired pictures with the work of a boy of talent. My effort, the best I could do after three years of instruction, is a zero product; the other picture, hurriedly done by a boy of talent, is an eighty per cent product when rated by professional standards. Must the teacher forever rate me at zero? Must he penalize me and most of the class for our lack of pictorial skill? Remember the condition: drawing is to be the most important subject in the curriculum; I cannot be promoted until I pass it.

To me the answer is easy. If the teacher is in an art school, he must penalize me; for I don't belong in an art school and must not be allowed to stay there. If the teacher is in a high school and if society demands that no one shall graduate who has not shown special pictorial talent, he must penalize me, because I have not measured up to the standard set for secondary education. But if society does not consider special talent an essential of education, then he must not penalize me.

Now glance at a few of the curricular subjects. In secondary mathematics our society does not demand any special talent, but only that degree of proficiency which can be attained by a person of the lowest grade of intelligence that can be accredited with a high-school diploma. In reading we do not require more power of appreciation than can be developed in the lowest intelligence that ought to be accredited with a high-school diploma. In history

we do not rate accomplishment by the standards of an institution for training historians, but by the standard of what can reasonably be expected of average intelligence. We give a mark of a hundred per cent for work which plainly shows that the student who did it can never become a historian. Of course we give grades to show degrees of proficiency in all these subjects, but we never use the professional part of the scale. The one hundred per cent mark for school work is where professional aptitude begins; what deserves high credit in a school may be below the professional zero.

Indeed I cannot see that the scale is continuous. There seem to be two different scales. On one is registered the degree of innate talent. On the other is registered the degree of intelligence in acquiring the forms of an elementary education. What I think is of no importance to you. Your business is to look at the evidence and to appraise it for yourself as the years go by. What do you think grading is in the other subjects, where special, innate skill is one matter and school proficiency is quite another matter? Can you recognize the two scales in composition that I see? Are you willing to disregard in English what is recognized in all other subjects? Will you penalize in English by a method that puts your subject on a different plane from all other subjects?

Most theme-readers (probably all in colleges) do just that. I will illustrate by the method used in grading freshman themes at the University of Illinois, as described ten years ago in an *English Journal* article. A grade of A means a literary knack that cannot be taught; if there is a tincture of such "positive virtue," a theme may be rated as high as B; if it has no positive virtue, but is orderly and clean, it is marked C. This is different from the grading of any other freshman subject at that university.

There are intelligent students, who can by application earn A's in all other subjects, that can never earn an A in English. The instructors judge that a theme is, to some extent, a literary product, to be evaluated by literary standards; hence to call a prosy theme A would seem to them an absurdity, a denial of an axiom.

Another illustration is the judging of themes by the College Entrance Board. They assume exactly the same axiom that is basic at Illinois and Harvard and every college I know of: a theme cannot be marked above seventy-five per cent unless it shows some charm of innate talent; the assumption on beginning to read any theme is that "you must show me a special skill if you are to earn a mark of more than 75." In my two periods of reading for the Board I was not allowed to rate any theme at more than 85, and I encountered some compositions that seemed excellent. There is nothing exceptional in this degree of severity. The Board is not peculiar in its grading. It is lenient at the passing mark of 60, for many a botching job, sprinkled with mechanical errors, is marked high enough to admit to college. The point illustrated is the assumption that high marks cannot be earned in English composition by mere intelligence. Able boys and girls, who can earn 90's in history and 100's in algebra by mere use of brains, are powerless to earn 86 in English. And the converse is true: a student with small power of memory or of abstract reasoning may earn 97 in English by the exercise of a peculiar skill that is not possessed by many competent teachers of English—at least they are competent according to present standards in our profession.

There is a fact that is surely worth a brief paragraph. This innate power to write charmingly is not so much as claimed by many good teachers. Very few teachers will maintain that they can increase this charm by any process

of pedagogy. It is not a curricular subject. And yet it is made a requisite for a high mark in English. I am not protesting against this situation. I am calling attention to it. What do you think of it?

Here is a true story to have in mind as you search for the answer. I walked down a street with a friend after we had listened to a group of Board readers discussing grades. He spoke: "Miss Dash says the last theme was 'thin.' I should like to know how thick her own composition is. What mark could she earn by her own standard if I applied it to one of her themes written on an assigned topic in a time limit?" His query suggests another: What proportion of teachers of high-school English could deserve 85 if rated by the standard of Miss Dash and the University of Illinois? It is a singular predicament in which we put ourselves when we set a high-school standard above what many of us teachers can attain.

Most teachers who face that predicament wriggle around to the converse question, one which interests them more: "How can I penalize the charming writer by telling him that his theme is worth no more than the theme of a student who utterly lacks charm?" That is the question that has been in your mind while you have been reading this section. You are tender-hearted, and you cannot imagine yourself degrading a lively theme by marking it only 100 if you also give 100 to a drearily-correct theme. It is a real question, which I do not presume to answer. This section is not furnishing answers. If only you now begin to make the query, you will in time reach the solution that fits your circumstances. But I can point to a place where you are likely to find the solution. It is in the other curricular subjects. If a student has a genius for geometry, such that mere textbook problems are playthings for him and the learning of demonstrations is laughably easy, he is

"penalized" by receiving only the 100 which can also be earned by a hard-working girl who has no mathematical genius. In all subjects the gifted student is told, so far as marks tell anything, that his work is worth no more than the work of the formal plodder. Do you think English must be different? Have you ever thought of making theme grades correspond with the grades in all other subjects? It could be done. I could say that my 100 indicated the clean and orderly work which every faithful and intelligent student can learn to do, that I myself do not possess and cannot teach the "positive virtues," that I hail them with joy and reverence them when I find them (just as I reverence those gifts of music and painting which I do not possess), that a theme which contains them is a hundred times more valuable than a theme that lacks them, but that a school has no machinery for rating a God-given power. Should a school try to evaluate what it cannot require?

The question raised in this section is of direct importance in handling a class, and no teacher should dare dismiss it until he has settled it for himself. To deny a perfect mark to an uncharming theme may tell boys that English is a mysterious, unfair subject, in which the mark never measures the effort, but only the emotions of a teacher. This would penalize him. Incidentally it might penalize a teacher heavily by bringing his subject into disrepute.

E. The Scale Illusion

For several reasons this topic may be unimportant: (1) many teachers have never seen a scale for grading composition; (2) only a very small minority have ever used one; (3) scales are now thought of as devices for the use of supervisors and surveyors of English, to evaluate gen-

eral conditions, and not for daily work of theme-readers; (4) the faith in scales may be waning, so that in a few years they will become obsolete. Yet you are more than likely to hear about them or to have your results tested by them or to be in a corps of teachers who assume that scales are a valuable apparatus. An incident will show how strong that assumption is in some quarters. When the Minnesota Syllabus of essentials appeared, one critic spoke ill of it because it contained no sample themes that could serve as a scale for evaluating composition; he declared that this was "educational myopia." You should at least know what was in his mind, so that, if the same accusation is ever made against you, you may be provided with the proper lenses for correcting your pedagogic short-sightedness.

It is a vast subject. I once spent twenty-five hours in trying to expound it to a class, without covering the ground. It is an intricate subject, very difficult to present. When I tried to analyze it in the *English Journal* (April, 1917), I failed to explain the chief element. Ever since then I have been trying to see farther into this complicated matter and to discover whether I ought to change my diagnosis. There is justification for a long chapter on the subject; but since it appears to be waning in importance, I will deal with it summarily.

You must realize that strong emotions are enlisted in the debate about scales. To some people they appear a sacred truth; to some they appear an unholy, mechanistic contrivance that clamps steel jaws on the tender beauties of English. This can be illustrated by an episode of the days when scales were first being discussed among teachers, a year after Professor Hillegas of Teachers College had set all our profession by the ears with his article in the *Teachers College Record.* The scene was a meeting of the New

England Association in Boston, addressed by a professor of rhetoric. He was an eloquent man. He spoke glowing words about composition as the imponderable effluence from souls which cannot be standardized; he spoke winged words about the hallowed nature of the theme-reader's sensitivity. When he concluded, the audience applauded, not simply as if it was pleased with a good performance, but as if it was grateful for deliverance from evil. At that time the maximalists were all against scales. Ten years later, at Detroit, I saw a maximalist chairman of a National Council committee defending scales.

The case against scales is easy to plead by that sort of emotional appeal. You could plead it yourself and do not need help from me. What you need is to see why the eloquent man may be wrong. Professor Hillegas knew of an abominable condition in education, a condition that is injurious to teachers and unjust to pupils—namely: composition, the most essential subject in the curriculum, is an unknown quantity, a subjective variable. In all other subjects, to be sure, there are variations of opinion as to what objectives should be and whether teaching has been effective; but in the main all supervisors of those subjects agree that proficiency can be tested in certain ways. In composition all is different. If a certain type of theme seems excellent to one school principal and execrable to another, there is no telling what teachers should strive to do. Composition becomes a game of blindman's buff in which teachers chase about wildly while Excellence dodges them. And the futilities of teaching are less of an evil than the hardships worked upon pupils. Alice Roe is said to have done excellent work in A school; she moves to B, and the school there tells her that she is a failure. Thus parents are baffled, and tax-payers feel robbed, and society wrathily decides that it is not being served by the schools.

The condition can never be improved until there is some consensus of opinion as to what constitutes a good theme. The question of "What is theme value?" is not theoretical; the wrong answer wastes millions of dollars and weakens education at a cardinal point. The question can never be answered until we discover how to test theme value. Professor Hillegas was making an effort to find the test without which education will remain a foolish sport.

His method was logical. He did not send out a questionnaire to the disputants and try to set up a court of arbitration, but appealed to many sorts of educated people, to secure a straw vote of society as to what theme value is. The ballot which he organized was of a natural sort: a jumbled lot of eighty-three samples of composition, ranging from the zero value of an imitation of the writing of an idiot to the high value of a passage of literature. Each of four hundred judges arranged these samples in what seemed to him the order of excellence, and a composite judgment of relative excellence was thus secured. The theory, a perfectly rational one, was that a person making a survey of compositional conditions could familiarize himself with the ten samples in the published scale of relative merits, could say of any given theme, "You are nearer in value to this sample in the scale than to any other sample," and could thus rate it by an objective standard that had validity anywhere.

Thus was born the scale that became the ancestor of a legion of scales. It was seen to have defects: (1) The selections were so short as not to show much about the writers' power of organizing material. (2) The selections were written by students of different grades, and hence were difficult to apply to any particular class for showing differences between grades. (3) The selections were so varied in type that the scale was difficult to apply to show

differences within narratives, or within expositions, etc. But the principle was established. Extension and refinement could come with time.

They came. There was the Thorndike Extension, the Nassau County Supplement of Trabue, the Harvard-Newton scales, the Van Wagenen scales for different types of composition, the Lewis scale for letters, the Providence Public School scale, the Hudelson scale. I suppose that half of the large cities in the country have experimented with their own scales. Everywhere wondering novices and progressive heads of departments have allied themselves to work out scales suited to local conditions.

I have seen only one scholarly objection to the principle of scales for measuring composition values: two articles by Dr. Isidore Kayfetz, of New York University, in the *Pedagogical Seminary* for December, 1914, and September, 1916, which were "critical studies" of the Hillegas scale and the Harvard-Newton scale. He conceded that "a scale would be of great service to teachers if it could be devised," but contended that a set of subjective judgments made without a standard cannot be transmuted into an objective standard. He said the great defect of any such effort is that "it considers merely the results and entirely loses sight of the conditions under which the work was accomplished"; also that "the qualities of the compositions were judged according to expert literary standards, not according to pedagogical standards." Dr. Kayfetz seems to have had no followers. I have not met any instructor in a school of education who agrees with him; I have not even heard of one by personal inquiries in five schools.

Nor do I recall meeting any teacher who objected to scales except for the reason given at Boston, which I think is entirely wrong. It seems to me that teachers ought

to welcome any effort for objectivity in theme-grading. Most of them seem to do so. If they have any conception of the damage done by subjective muddling, they pin their faith to the only definite and concrete method in sight. There is no question that many schools, *by learning to be more objective*, have improved their grading by the use of a scale. A preliminary experiment with a scale will prove how woefully variant we are when left to our own emotions, and an effort to conform to *any* objective standard will make us less variant.

But the reasons against scales stand out in my mind more clearly now than they did in 1917. They are based on twelve years of constant and curious attention to a theory which is everywhere accepted. I am no crusader, hate to be peculiar, and should prefer to join the company of all the believers. But I am unable to follow my desire. If this is to be an honest book, there is nothing to do but explain why I think that any composition scale must be illusory.

I will say nothing of the minor reasons which I assembled in 1917, because you can figure them out easily enough if you have read about the Literary Tradition. I will limit myself to the one big reason which flashed upon me in 1920, when I had learned more about minimum essentials and was explaining them to a class of teachers. I remember the moment when it hit me; I was in the midst of my litter of commas and demons. Out of this rose, unannounced, startling, an idea: "Then any composition scale is opposed to the program of minima." You can imagine I was distracted, stopped short, and had difficulty in resuming my talk about the small matters in hand.

The essence of any scale is that it furnishes a comparison of *general* merit. A theme-reader is familiar with a series of whole compositions; he mentally lays a theme

alongside these and asks, "Which sample composition is most like this theme in *general* quality?" That is a process of literary evaluation. The theme is more effective as a whole than sample 2, more effective than sample 3, perhaps more effective than sample 4, but certainly not so effective as sample 5; therefore it should have about the grade that belongs to sample 4.

Any teacher who is enforcing a program of minimum essentials may have to pass the same sort of judgment, and may aid himself by a scale. But he must also carry out another and entirely different process—seeing what tabooed errors occur. A general impression of quality will not tell about particular minima. Of course a number of elementary errors would produce an effect upon a teacher who was trying to root them out of a school, and might produce a part of a total impression. Also there is often a correlation between general good quality and faithfulness to essentials. But often a well-ordered and pleasing theme contains just those few particular "slight" errors which must reduce the theme below passing, after a certain time of the year, in any school that works by the method of a mastery of rudiments. No surveyor of educational efficiency, unfamiliar with this variable standard, can evaluate these minutiae, and his general impression by a scale method will not accord with the values that teachers must assign at certain times to certain blunders if they are following the strategy of minima.

I cannot see any escape from that statement. If a school adopts minima, it cannot trust to a scale. This is no mere theory. Read carefully the two openings of themes that are printed on the next page and see what judgment would have to be passed on them by a teacher of a tenth-year class during the second semester, after certain blunders have become inexcusable.

1

A little girl about ten years of age, said to be ..... living at ..... st. N .... Y .... was run down by an auto and instantly killed as she was crossing Broadway at 106th. St. yesterday mourning.

The child had been on an errand and was crossing Broadway on her return. She did not notice a large touring car that was speeding down the avenue until she was half way across the street, when, alarmed by the sound of the horn, she started to run but the auto was now so near that before it could be stopped it threw her down and passed over her body leaving her motionless.

2

As I was walking along Riverside one Sunday morning, I heard a sharp yelp and turning around I saw a big bull dog holding a small poodle by the neck: around the poodles neck was a collar to which was fastened a leader. The owner of this dog was holding fast to the leader and crying, "My poor Trix, let go of my Trix." I remembered having past the lady a little before, then she was holding Trix tightly under her arm.

But Mr. Bull would not let go, and Trix's fond mistress was getting more and more excited. "Who owns this beast anyway? Help! Help! O my dear Trix, what will he do to you! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!" . . .

If we count all the places in the first sample that could be marked as errors anywhere by any reasonable teacher after any reasonable instruction, we shall have the following list: small *s* and capital *S* for *street*, commas lacking to set off *New York*, period after *106th*, and misspelling of *morning*, comma lacking before *but*, comma lacking before *leaving*, and possibly a dangerously long and loosely-constructed sentence. Not one of these errors would be on any normal list of minima as an essential error. The second sample contains the following errors: no comma before *and* in the first sentence, no commas to set off *turning around*,

bulldog written as two words, colon for a semicolon, no apostrophe in *poodles*, comma before *let go*, *past* for *passed* (?), comma before *then*. The seriousness of five of these errors would depend on what a teacher had emphasized, but one of them would have to be an essential error in a normal list of minima: the sentence-error with *then*. Perhaps the comma before *let go* would also have to be counted a sentence-error, for there is an independent exclamation that does not belong with the command. You will see that I am not discussing "in the large" what ought to be called errors, nor what a list of minima ought to contain; I am speaking of the way in which *any* rational teacher would have to compare these two samples of composition if they came on the same day from two pupils in *any* class that was being taught by *any* system of minimum essentials. The themes show two different adjustments to *any* set of minima that could be applied uniformly to a class in a given week. The first is passable unless the teacher is very severe; the second is a failure compared with the first.

The samples are the beginnings of two themes in a pamphlet of school composition whose merit "has been determined with precision by a consensus of judges"; the samples fairly represent the whole themes. The combined judgments showed that each theme had a value of 78. Perhaps those grades can be defended "in the large" because the second is more lively. The consensus may be valid in some sphere of scholarship. It is not a test of theme value for any given teacher of a given class on a given day under a given system of minima. At any rate, I can't see how it is. Be sure that you see before you undertake to combine a composition scale with a list of essentials.

Even a person who thinks there is a halo on minimum essentials will be a bit uneasy after reading the two previous

paragraphs. They focus attention closely on those little specks of distinctions that are hardly visible to the naked eye of a person who is at all generous or catholic. He somehow suspects that the larger and broader truth of theme values in this pamphlet has been missed. Hence I had better present him two other compositions, in full, and invite his criticism of them. What are the relative merits of the passages, not with reference to minima, but judged by general impressions of excellence?

1

One Sunday, toward the end of my summer vacation, I was in bathing at the Parkway Baths. In the Brighton Beach Motordrome, a few rods away, an aviation meet was going on. Several times one of the droning machines had gone whirring by over our heads, so that when the buzzing exhaust of a flier was heard it did not cause very much comment. Soon, however, the white planes of "Tom" Sopwith's Wright machine were seen glimmering above the grandstand. Everyone stood spellbound as he circled the track several times, and then headed out to sea. He was seen to have a passenger with him. Suddenly, the regular hum of his motor was broken by severe pops, and the engine ran slower, missing fire badly. In response, to Sopwith's movements, the big flier tilted and swooped down to the beach from aloft like an eagle. The terrified crowd made a rush to get out of the way as the airship came on, but Sopwith could not land on the beach, but skimmed along close to the water instead. Suddenly his wing caught the water, and the big machine somersaulted and sank beneath the waves. The aviators soon came bobbing up and were taken away in a launch, but the accident will not soon be forgotten by those who saw it.

2

How one loves to see the burly figure of him, this thick-skinned, seemingly opaque, perhaps sulky, almost stupid man of practice, pitted against some light adroit man of theory, all equipt with

clear logic, and able anywhere to give you why for wherefore! The adroit man of theory, so light of movement, clear of utterance, with his bow full-bent and quiver full of arrow-arguments, —surely he will strike down the game, transfix everywhere the heart of the matter; triumph everywhere, as he proves that he shall and must do? To your astonishment, it turns out oftenest no. The cloudy-browed, thick-soled, opaque practicality, with no logic utterance, in silence mainly, with here and there a low grunt or growl, has in him what transcends all logic-utterance; a congruity with the unuttered. The speakable, which lies atop, as a superficial film, or outer skin, is his or is not his; but the doable, which reaches down to the world's center, you find him there!

You will do well to read the selections again. Read critically. Register your judgment of the relative values before you read on.

Any teacher of tenth- or eleventh-year classes recognizes the quality of the first. It is average unskilful narrative, with some interest in it, some good variation of sentences, some aimless connecting by *however* and *but* that do not show any contrast, an overuse of *soon* and *suddenly* and *suddenly* and *soon*, and a clumsy pair of *buts*. It is perhaps not poor by school standards, but it shows no glint of excellence. As for the second selection, it is of such a quality as few teachers will ever see in a theme. Can you conceive that anyone but Carlyle wrote it? The penetrating analysis of two types of character, pictured with a sheen of metaphors that almost dazzle, but that are never entangled, that always blend—this is a bit of word-weaving that not one man in ten million could ever achieve. It is graciously accorded a grade of 93 by a set of judges who were chosen by Professor Edward L. Thorndike "to demonstrate the value of objective scales." The artless account of Sopwith's accident was judged by them to have a merit of 85. Think it over.

F. One Way of Grading

No one should spend time with this section unless he is quite at sea about theme-grading or is quite dissatisfied with what he has been doing. So much depends upon a teacher's temperament and circumstances that any effort to suggest a mode of grading is reckless. I offer one very plain model of how to go to work, not because I wish to, but because some novices will be grieved if I do not. Regard what follows as a mere possibility, as a way of beginning operations. If you use it, treat it as only a preliminary experiment. Study from the outset to depart from it and to develop a method of your own as fast as you can.

After all the talk of this chapter about the esoterics of theme values you perhaps feel that you are operating with a mystery. Be comforted. The case is somewhat parallel with a chapter on "price" in an economics textbook. After reading the deep and contradictory philosophies of value and demand and money equivalents you might feel afraid to undertake any commercial transaction. But a child can spend a dime shrewdly for candy; women shop fearlessly and successfully. So can you grade themes with ease if you forget all the theorizings. A few numbered paragraphs will show any practical person how to mark rather rapidly and confidently and fairly. I will assume that you are using a percentage system of marks, 1 to 100, because that is common and easy. If you use letters, A to E, translate the percentages to your letters: A = 95 to 100, B = 85 to 95, etc.

1. Think of the process as subtracting from one hundred per cent, for that is essentially what is done by any corps of practical theme-readers that I ever heard of. Assume that a theme which you begin to read is going to be worth one hundred per cent unless there are

painful and definite reasons for subtracting from the perfect mark.

2. If you are to be fair and helpful in dealing with children, you must give yourself, and be able to give them, a perfectly concrete reason for every subtraction from one hundred per cent.

3. If your conscience or your theory of teaching obliges you to indicate literary skill by your marking, decide definitely for just what reason, and to what extent, you will subtract for the lack of skill. For example, as you have seen, the process used by the corps of freshman instructors at Illinois amounts to subtracting twenty-five per cent for the lack of "positive virtues." I think that is severe even in college. I think ten per cent is enough for school. I am afraid to subtract anything, because this is bound to be a question of my own taste or mood. When you have had some experience of the ways in which one teacher thinks a style is "thin" or "wooden" and another teacher thinks that the same style is "mighty creditable and sensible," you will distrust your own critical faculties. But that is your affair. Whatever seems just to you must be a *definite* reason, one which you can concretely explain to Asa Bushnell. Decide definitely what is the limit of subtraction for lack of skill. When you have read a theme, be lenient; subtract only as much as you feel compelled to. Be quick; don't poise your pencil or fuss or wonder. Here is the place where most of the time and energy is wasted by theme-readers. Here is where all the "nervous wear and tear" occurs. Don't be hesitant and nervous. If a reason is not instantly present to your mind, don't subtract. Make the qualities of the theme do the work. Save yourself.

4. Decide definitely upon a limit of subtraction for general structure. If, for example, you have given special

instructions that this set of themes must start promptly, and if the theme now in your hands begins with an aimless, tiresome "introduction" of exactly the kind that you forbade, you will now do what you told the class you would do—subtract. If the order of events or places is distinctly wrong, subtract ten or twenty, or forty, according to what you have definitely predetermined.

5. A good guide for definiteness in this sort of penalizing is to do no subtracting unless you have announced to the class what you would do. When you are before a class, you are compelled to be definite and are less likely to be unreasonable; but in private you may have emotional flurries or gusts of temper. Gage your severity by what you have said to the class.

6. There are only three reasons for subtracting, two of which have now been described: lack of literary skill, lack of structure. In "lack of structure" you may easily include the failure to follow directions for any particular mode of treatment—such, for example, as telling a narrative when the directions were explicitly that there must not be a narrative. If you define these two reasons to yourself, if you apply them leniently and mechanically, you will carry conviction to the class. And that is the purpose of sensible grading in any class not composed of literary artists. Had you thought of that? You will be surprised, after a few weeks of practice, at the small amount of worry caused by these two reasons, and at the small amount of subtraction necessary for the great majority of themes.

7. The third reason for subtracting is the mechanical errors. If your list of these is formed slowly, is kept small, is taught with proper emphasis, a violation will probably stand out prominently in the first reading. Don't make yourself a detective charged with the duty of seeing every error. Tell the class that you do not pretend to see all the

mistakes. You may be sure that you will see enough to keep the theme grades where they belong. When you have subtracted for errors in minima, you have the grade. You have finished.

8. I hear your exclamation of astonishment because I have not spoken of "constructive criticism." You have expected to write notes of encouragement or critical expositions of rhetorical shortcomings. Of course you will do as much of that sort of labor as your instincts call for and your time allows. Remember, however, that this is not grading; it is a whole policy of rhetoric and does not belong here. Your powers of personality will operate in spite of yourself. In this section we are simply finding out what a theme is worth as a school task.

9. Learn to read a theme only once, for these cogent reasons: (1) A judgment formed after a first reading is more likely to be just than one formed after a third worried reading. (2) An English teacher is over-worked; if you don't learn to economize time, you are lost. (3) You can give much better service to students if, by reading twice as fast, you read twice as much composition. When you reread and putter and wonder, you are not rendering service.

10. Don't use a lot of symbols. You save time and do better teaching if you simply draw a line under each error or put a ring around it. Perhaps you don't yet realize, after careful reading of two chapters, that you are really concerned only with those errors that have been advertised and that should be understood at once by any average student. It is better pedagogy not to inform him about errors which he should understand perfectly well himself, but to oblige him to find out what is wrong.

11. Don't mark all the errors. You instruct boys and girls better if you do not plunge them into a swirl of all kinds of mistakes. Cultivate their responsibility by marking

only the errors for which they are responsible. Make each red symbol important by giving it this meaning for the student: "Here you have been careless." If some of the marks mean "You have fallen short of an achievement which a finer spirit would have attained," they can only irritate and discourage.

12. If you want to see a ready-made system of symbols which you can vary for your own needs, here is one. Draw a line under the comma that ought not to exist or the vacant place where a comma ought to exist, or the word that is misspelled. If you have issued a warning that certain errors will now be twice or thrice as sinful as the common run, draw two or three lines. If you wish to indicate a mistake that is perhaps excusable, but that ought to be corrected, put a ring around the place. For a sentence-error use a big check or a big star made of three intersecting lines. If you must occasionally give some explanation of an error that is not of the typical sort, make your message of more than telegraphic brevity; "rewrite" will cover half of such cases.

13. A few moments of calculation will show for an ordinary theme something of this sort: "nothing to be taken off for lack of charm, 10 to be taken off for failure in structure, 20 to be taken off for the errors in mechanics; 100 less 30 = 70." I often show a mark as "90 − 30 = 60," which means that for failure in structure 10 was subtracted, and that from the 90 (which the writer might have had if he had been careful) 30 was subtracted for carelessness. Sometimes I show a mark like "40 + 20 = 60," which means that carelessness produced a mark of 40, but that the content was so good that I could not forbear allowing a bonus of 20 for it.

14. A device that has long been a favorite of mine, especially for use with a corps of teachers who want to work uniformly, is the "unit error." In my own school we have made the unit a comma before *but* and have marked this or

any corresponding kind of carelessness with one line. Certain spellings are rated as two units; a few choice ones as three units; a sentence-error as five units. We can begin the year by subtracting 3 for a unit, and can shift the value to 4 or 5 as the months pass. When the errors have been marked in a theme, it is a matter of only a few seconds to count up the number of lines, multiply by the unit, and subtract. This is dreadfully unesthetic. It makes a very effective appeal to boys. Take your choice.

15. A prevalent feeling in our profession is that a theme grade ought to be based on the amount of effort made by the writer. If a bright girl doesn't try, it is argued, she should be rated down; if a dull boy shows improvement, he should receive credit. You have rather strong feelings on this point, which would not be altered by anything I can say; so I will not argue the question. I will merely offer one statement of fact. If I should tell Fred that his theme is worth only 60 because he did not try hard, and should tell Henry that his theme is worth 70 because he did try hard, and should then tell both boys that the theme with the lower mark is better, they would unite in considering me a queer person, probably a dishonest and impossible person. If I knew how to alter their conceptions of right and wrong, I might try to evaluate efforts. But my mind is so oddly like theirs that I cannot use numbers to show relative efforts or friendliness or personality or need of encouragement. I can use them only as boys do, to show relative values of objective materials.

CHAPTER XII

ORAL COMPOSITION

A. Four Reasons for Faith in Oral Composition

There is a prevailing, country-wide faith in the efficacy of oral composition. To me this faith seems exaggerated and too easy-going, as I shall show in the next two sections. Here I will briefly describe it by giving four examples of the assumptions that people usually make when they advocate oral composition. As you read each example, see if you can detect any fallacy; apply yourself to it as if you were amusing yourself with the question "What is wrong with this picture?"

1. Oral skill is more valuable. We talk a hundred times, perhaps ten thousand times, as much as we write. Therefore oral composition is more important in the curriculum than written composition, and we ought to devote more time to it.

2. Oral composition is the approach to written. The case as it appears in the grammar grades is strongly put by Superintendent Bernard M. Sheridan in a small book which I am never weary of praising, *Speaking and Writing English:*

> The child who is to be taught to write well must first be taught to talk well. . . . All the qualities that are to be developed in written composition must be, and ought to be, developed first in the oral exercise. . . . There will be no improvement at all unless children are habituated from the first to be critical of their spoken English. . . . The child who is trained from the first to speak in

clean-cut sentences will after a while acquire such a strong sentence sense that he will seldom, if ever, write as a sentence a group of words that is not a sentence.

3. Teachers have succeeded. For fear of misrepresenting the claims to success in oral work I will describe a case in my own experience. The facts were exactly as I state them. See if you can detect what is wrong with my interpretation of them. It seems to me quite wrong.

One evening a committee of three boys came to my study with a request that I should help them to organize a small debating club. If they had had any inkling of my mental state when they made their errand known, they would have been the most amazed boys under the canopy. For three years I had maneuvered to secure that request. I knew that if the proposal came from me it would have no vitality, that if it came from them it might spring into enduring improvement in the most precious skill—ability to speak persuasively to an audience.

I controlled my emotion as best I could, and we fell to discussing a plan. The club was to be small. Instead of going out for membership we were to take the attitude of charily admitting a few to a privilege. Nine boys who felt an interest were selected. For the first meeting a simple, homely topic was proposed—"Resolved: that attendance at the principal games should be compulsory." This was a burning question in school, and feeling in the club ran high. You should have heard the first efforts of those most ambitious boys from the two upper classes. The boys were abashed even before their comrades in the enterprise who sat about informally in my study; they could hardly speak in sentences; their enunciation was a mush; the structure of their arguments was tumble-down. A visitor might have supposed that debating was an art quite beyond their reach.

But a little practice worked a miracle. Tongues quickly learned to strike vigorously against teeth; sentences soon flourished; a sense of structure was evident in the spoken arguments. In their fourth meeting they spoke with assurance and force. It is likely that every member of the club, as he now looks back over the space of twenty years to his school days, regards those hours of oral composition as the most precious in his education.

4. Books explain how to succeed. The following brief extracts from a manual of advice for teachers give a fair sample of the optimism that is expressed in most modern books on the subject. Can you see any reason for distrusting this very, very pleasant picture? It was painted by an actual flesh-and-blood high-school teacher of long experience in actual classrooms.

It is necessary that the teacher in the beginning of the work should make every endeavor to generate the right atmosphere—the atmosphere of perfect candor and genuine altruism. . . . Criticism of structure involves consideration of the grace and effectiveness of the beginning, the middle, and the end. . . . The continuation of the criticism on structure considers the unity, coherence, and emphasis of the whole composition and the paragraphs. . . . One of the first things the class will admire in a theme is the mastery of an adequate vocabulary. . . . Our endeavor will not be to employ the phrase for the sake of the phrasing, but to employ the newer word because it reflects our more precise thinking and our more intense feeling. . . . A student asked to assume the function of the critic will soon grow more sensitive to the violation of coherence, emphasis, and variety, and will easily come to recognize the charm and force that rest in effective structure. . . . With head naturally erect, with chest properly expanded, with feet placed at an easeful angle, and with hands and arms in a natural and free position, we look directly into the eyes of our listeners, knowing that in meeting them frankly and unabashed we secure in their immediate response a most

direct and sympathetic support. . . . Diaphragmatic breathing helps us to place the focus farther back and secure more volume and a resulting vibration that does not die a few feet from the mouth. . . . Musical quality may likewise be developed by rounding the tones. . . . By bringing our nature under firm control and by cultivating calmness of temperament we shall quickly accentuate the improvement.

If you are to receive any benefit from this chapter, you must do some of the work. Don't rely on me, because I may be a prejudiced witness. Don't rush ahead to read my explanations of those four cases, but go back over them, ponder them, see if you can find anything wrong.

B. Four Reasons for Doubt

My own reasons for distrusting the four kinds of evidence are as follows:

1. That oral skill is more valuable. This reasoning seems to me a non sequitur. If you will test it by a parallel bit of logic, you can make your own judgment: "Honesty is at least a thousand times more important than arithmetic in real life, because we need to use it a thousand times more often. Therefore honesty should receive more time and emphasis than arithmetic in the school curriculum." Do you suppose that such an argument will ever be used in preparing a course of study? I should guess not, for this reason: honesty is too deep and precious a virtue to be reduced to a curricular subject taught by a method; the desirability of a power is not the sole basis for stress in a course of study; we are limited by teachability; we have to give a great deal of time to arithmetic, but have not put honesty into the curriculum at all.

"Value" in a school subject cannot be measured by the ratio of the commonness of its use. We must take into ac-

count what it accomplishes in mental development. Until we know that oral work can be made a force for education, that it can be made to grip and exercise the mind, we shall not prove its value as compared with the known efficacy of written work.

2. That oral composition is the approach to written. I have never discovered any evidence that the making of oral sentences was a training in written sentences. That statement is in flat opposition to almost unanimous testimony, and hence I should like to suppress it as probably showing how poor an observer I am. But I can be more useful if I show you how easy it is to be myopic. Surely you can think of some woman who speaks the most delightfully modulated sentences, but who in her letters uses commas for periods. I recall a man whose spoken sentences made me sin in envy, but he could not write them. The most Chesterfieldian boy I ever knew, whose graceful spoken sentences always showed the crudity of mine, struggled for four years to learn the difference between one written sentence and two written sentences. The relation of sound to symbol in sentence-making seems parallel to the same relation in spelling: all the world assumes it, but I have never been able to catch sight of it. When I read Superintendent Sheridan's book and see how that master teacher, the most forceful in the country, builds his whole procedure on the oral training that passes into written forms, I feel like suppressing this paragraph. But, instead, I will guess at a possible way in which he is deceived. For you know that specialists in any art, like poetry or salesmanship or painting, are apt to be poor analyzers of their success. If a corps of teachers is trained to build sentence sense from the second grade up, if they strive in all composition work to enforce sentences, if they tell pupils to use "oral periods" and are always suggesting written forms, it is quite conceivable that they are

doing something different from what they suppose—that their oral work is, in effect, an appeal to writing. It is quite possible that if the children were confined to oral work for two years, without hearing or seeing any reference to written sentences, no transfer of oral skill to written pages would be seen. Try to observe the data for this most interesting question. If you do not start with a theory, but care only for the facts, you will teach better.

3. That teachers have succeeded. An anecdote will best illustrate the fallacy in my account of the debating club. I once sat in an audience that listened to half a dozen accounts of "the splendid success I have had with oral." Some of us were made gloomy, for conditions where we live are different. The next day I fell in talk with Miss X, who had been in the audience, a woman who had taught successfully for fifteen years. She spoke of the beautiful testimonies, paused, gazed hard at me with an odd look in her eyes, and smiled a slight, challenging smile that seemed to say, "Honest now; fess up." Then her lips parted and emitted these words: "Can you believe those women were sincere?" I was quite dumfounded, for I had never questioned the entire truthfulness of the reports. When I asked what caused such a suspicion in her mind, she replied: "I could tell my stories, too. Last year I took hold of a class of almost speechless juniors and succeeded so well in oral work with them that they have been thanking me ever since. But I wasn't teaching composition. I am rather ashamed of using so much time for oral." To you her words are now an enigma. After you have been through five years of work with both kinds of composition, you will either understand them perfectly or you will be one of those who report exhilarating success with oral work. Here's hoping that you may become one of the optimists.

If you will now look back to the account of the debating club in the previous section, you can learn why I had no

difficulty in understanding Miss X. I did no teaching in the infancy of that club. It took no art to improve the boys' enunciation, because they already knew how to enunciate; they merely overcame stage fright and made themselves use their ability. There was no art in securing sentences from them; a little practice removed the inhibitions of embarrassment and released the knowledge of sentences which they had had all the while. There was no art of cultivating oral coherence and emphasis; these boys were such a picked lot that, when diffidence was overcome, they could put into action what they knew about written composition. I was not teaching. I have no right to parade this club as an example of success in composition.

4. That books explain how to succeed. The three previous reasons for doubt may have been somewhat novel to you, but I am sure you have anticipated this fourth one: I cannot find the books that really tell *how* to succeed. All that I have seen content themselves with *naming the achievements.* Did you have a sinking feeling as you read what you were to accomplish? You were "to develop an enthusiasm, to generate an atmosphere of altruism, to stimulate an admiration for vocabulary and firm calmness of temperament." I stand aghast when I read the list of those supernal glories of pedagogy. Where are the teachers who know *how* to achieve them? Can they tell you and me anything about their art?

And where are all the students who have acquired musical voices and coherence and poise? The answer would be very valuable. Your teaching ability will be increased if you can make the acquaintance of half a dozen of these young people who have been so gloriously improved by school training, learn who their teachers were, correspond with the teachers, get first-hand information as to *how* the results were attained.

There are some indications that no book ever will tell us much about the *how* of success in oral work. For example, I have just looked through what seems to be the best recent treatment of oral composition, by a man of much experience, who is himself a competent speaker, and I find that he puts this disconcerting question: "Why is it that at conventions of teachers, contributions dealing with instruction in speaking are *likely to be papers read?*" His question can mean only that prominent teachers of oral composition are commonly unable to speak their thoughts to an audience. I should suppose that the question was a mean or playful one if I had not heard it frequently from other people who know what they are talking about and who inquire in all seriousness. I have never heard the answer. It will be useful to you if you can find it.

I cannot learn of any book that will tell you of practical, specific means to the end in oral composition. Just while I am writing this chapter my eye falls on a review of a new book about oral work and I, knowing something of the author, feel my heart beating more rapidly; this is likely to be the very thing. But the reviewer says, "We are not instructed at all definitely as to how to carry out these admonitions. . . . The difficult art of securing this attention to form is not even discussed." Can you blame me for being rather skeptical about what future books will do?

C. Practical Difficulties as I Have Found Them

My own experiences have all been of the sort illustrated by the pettiest and easiest effort an oral teacher has to make, to change a boy's pronunciation of a word. He said "wahter," and I wanted him to say "wawter." I told him so. He couldn't say "wawter." So I pronounced the "waw" several times and made him try to imitate me. Finally

he succeeded after a fashion; he actually said "wawter" several times in my presence while that pronunciation was required. But he never adopted it; he found it as impossible to acquire the new habit as I should find it to learn to say "Wahrd" instead of "Wawrd." My pronunciation disgusted him, because in the locality where he lived people said "wahter." If he had said "wawter," he would have marked himself for ridicule. And I sympathize with him entirely because of my experience with the word *wash.* It seems that the correct pronunciation is *wŏsh,* whereas I have a lifelong habit of "wawsh"; and I have so little skill in upturning the foundations of my speech that I dare not attempt to alter "wawsh." It is a far-reaching matter, embracing many of the very common words in *wa: want, watch, waffle, walk, warrior, warm.* If you care to spend a few minutes with a big dictionary, you will discover some startling new ideas about the "correct" sounds of *a* in these words—so confusing that I doubt whether any teacher can master them. To speak of them ever so briefly would stretch this paragraph to an intolerable length.

Have you ever spent five minutes thinking of the essay that could be written about the *a* in *last?* The list of oral minima for a certain large city instructs teachers to cultivate an *a* with a dot over it, a sound which I can only approximate, something between *läst* and *lost.* A teacher from this city once made a remark to me about "läst" night. In an envious tone I asked him whence the adornment to his speech. He flushed and explained that he was trying to be loyal to the code of his city. Well—have you ever heard a man—a regular, straightforward, masculine man—try to say "läst"? Women can succeed fairly well, but a boy—if a boy undertakes it, he brings himself and all oral English into disrepute. The sound is not merely impossible for a self-respecting boy west of the Connecticut River; it is

a violation of social decency for him to use it among his fellows. And I want to be included among his fellows; I don't want to hear him make such an effort at such a ludicrous affectation.

The excessive difficulties in producing any slightest alteration in habits of pronunciation are beyond estimating. I can make no headway. So you can see how bewildered I am when I hear anyone talk easily about "improving pronunciation"—just like that. Wrong habits in spelling are hard enough to overcome, requiring all the ingenuity and force I can bring to bear. But they are slight and superficial compared with habits of speech. For one thing, speech habits have been hardened by a million times as many repetitions. For another thing, they are not detached and specific like the *i* in "discribe," but permeate the whole organism of speech. And in the third place, they are social matters, alteration in which may be an offense to very deep instincts of propriety. Yet we are informed with an easy gesture that the alterations are produced, and quite casually, in oral composition.

Contrast with such an assumption one fact that is reported in a hopeful article on the need of correct English: "A man who was at the head of an institution of learning for many years, who was an authority on foreign languages and the author of several scientific treatises, would, in common conversation with his family, sometimes disagree verbs and nouns. When reproved by his wife, he would exclaim, 'Oh, the lack of early training!' . . . In a long life he was never able fully to overcome the lack of early training."

As I go up the scale of the kinds of improvement in oral composition, I am the more bewildered. Above the simple matter of changing pronunciations of certain words comes the matter of changing the general voice quality. No doubt the tone and way of enunciating can be altered in a student

—if he is eager to alter, if his teacher is skilful and technically trained, if he has the patience for long-continued efforts, and if he will persevere against the ridicule of his associates. But the ordinary teacher of ordinary students, if he goes innocently to work without knowing the obstacles, will be disheartened. This chapter is written to save you from plunging into that slough of despond. Every year there are thousands of novices who go blithely to work in September, expecting to create musical voices in boys; in October they are mortified; in December they decide that oral composition is a world of make-believe, where it is bad form to confess facts.

Higher up on the scale of the elements of oral composition comes that spirit of helpful, searching criticism which the class is to develop. I am not denying that some ingenious and spirited teachers, in some favored schools, succeed in this delightful way. I am only asking you to notice the conditions of that success, so that you will not despair if your hardest efforts bring only a jot of it.

Structure in oral themes? I have heard, and I believe, that some teachers in some schools have found ways of securing unity and coherence in oral composition. This paragraph only asks you to consider how much more difficult that achievement is in oral than in written work. I know experienced teachers who find their powers so stretched to secure a slight improvement in written structure that they think the attempt to improve oral structure is almost a joke. Take stock of that fact. Don't grieve if you find that your prentice craft is not superior to that of the journeymen. Don't feel that the world is topsy-turvy if you discover that you have to develop the orderly structure in the written form, and then transfer a little of it to oral work.

Be cheerful and adventurous as you enter upon oral composition. Possibly you are one of the gifted people,

luckily circumstanced, who can go from strength unto strength and see results bloom ever more copiously along their way. This chapter is not a prediction of disappointment. It is a caution not to take the blessings for granted.

Two considerations may help to encourage you if results seem slight. The first may be called the theorem of "in the schoolian sense." You read a published goal for the year's work: "The ability to use fluently and accurately a wide, accurate, and expressive speaking vocabulary." (I am not inventing; I quote the words from a book that is taken seriously in our profession.) That formula seems to mean an accomplishment high above your own powers; you recall the professors who lectured rather acceptably without being fluent or using an expressive vocabulary. But if you make inquiry of a teacher who reaches this goal at the end of every year, you will hear something like this: "Oh, well, that doesn't mean by the standard of orators, but just by an ordinary school standard. You can train a good many pupils in a class to increase their fluency and to be a little more careful and lively in their choice of words." All achievement, you see, is relative. The grand goals are usually meant only in the "schoolian" sense.

The second consideration will flash upon you if you read this anecdote. At a meeting of school principals Mr. A described the splendid morale of his school. Mr. B was much depressed, for conditions at his school were normally bad; improvement during each year was slight and hard to attain. As Mr. B, quite gloomy, was leaving the session, Mr. C clapped him on the back and whispered consolingly, "What a liar A is!" Mr. A was not a liar; he was a truthful man who had the priceless gift of optimism about his own doings. Perhaps we should all try to be more like A and less like B. At any rate, you may find your course of life more smooth if you can talk somewhat like A.

All the skepticism that I express in this section is to warn you not to accept assumptions. I am no prophet and cannot say what the future development of this subject may be. I can do best service by urging you not to try to prophesy, not to rush to be a champion until you have assayed facts for a few years. Compare the case of minimum essentials, which, as formulated programs for teaching, are of about the same age as oral composition. When I examine the methods of many practical teachers, I see that they have always used what is essentially a program of minima. Therefore I feel no doubt of its validity. But the oral theme is new in the world, not yet adopted by some of the most able high-school teachers. Nobody can predict its future. We can only watch and experiment.

D. The Difficulties That Other People Have Found

A year ago I saw a little indication that already the tide may have turned against oral themes. Though it was merely an expression of one woman's opinion, it seemed a portent to me; for it was the first protest against oral composition that I had ever seen in the *English Journal.* It was voiced by an Illinois teacher, who has had a good deal of experience in high-school work and who wrote enthusiastically about "Oral Composition in College." She began with these paragraphs:

Educational fashions come and go almost as quickly as short skirts and comic songs. And when a pedagogic idea is new, one hears about it as often as the Victrola grinds out the season's popular air. A number of years ago the subject for discussion at English conferences was the value of the oral theme. Experiments were instituted to prove its efficiency, and questionnaires circulated

to inquire about the amount of oral composition and the method of conducting it which seemed most satisfactory.

Nowadays one hears comparatively little about oral composition. But that is not to say it has gone out of use; there are still people who whistle "I'm forever blowing bubbles." Indeed one of the reasons why we hear so little may be that oral composition has settled into its niche in the school curriculum, and there, taken as a matter of course, it no longer provokes excitement, pro or con. It may be, however, that enthusiasm for this form of teaching English is considerably waning in the elementary and secondary schools. I can see how a conscientious teacher might feel that oral composition is a lazy waste of time. I often felt so when I taught in the high school. No exertion is made, as a rule, by any but the few who can speak in a class period. But supposing that this disadvantage can be overcome, the really vulnerable spot in oral composition still remains; in the high school it is almost impossible to get from the students any stimulating or corrective criticism. This being the case, little real progress can be made. I have, of course, seen a class of students ready to graduate from the high school who, having had oral-composition work for four years, show decided improvement in ease of manner and fluency of diction; I have never seen any marked improvement in clearness of thought or orderly arrangement of material in oral themes.

Put with that statement the recent remark of a very successful head of the high-school English department in a western city, who advocates some oral work and uses it with good results: "Oh, I suppose oral themes will go the way of the other fads." These two teachers can prove nothing, but they can set us to examining for ourselves. From many quarters I hear similar opinions which give me pause. One is a single sentence in the *Report on the Conditions of the Teaching of English in Secondary Schools of New Jersey*, 1920. The Report is based on the replies sent by 150 teachers to a questionnaire. The committee thus comments on the

replies to the query about oral composition: "It is agreed, especially in the larger schools, that oral composition should precede written, and has a reinforcing relation to it. *But the full importance of oral composition in itself is not yet generally appreciated.*" That is to say, the committee feels sure of the importance and charges the teachers with not having waked up to it. There is, you will agree, one other possible reason for the teachers' lack of appreciation.

In this paragraph I will stow seven other opinions which may be straws to show a wind of opinion or may prove the short-sightedness of seven men in a progressive world. They live in Texas, California, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Illinois, but their opinions are not given in that order. (1) A principal of a large school, who believes in oral composition, says, "I think that one-third of my English teachers —and all of my teachers are good ones—can succeed with oral work; the other two-thirds waste time with it." (2) A man in charge of the English entrance requirements for a large university declared, "So far as I can judge, the results of oral composition are disastrous." (3) A superintendent of schools who had been for ten years a teacher of English sent out a questionnaire; the replies were very favorable to oral composition. His comment was this: "When I investigated facts, I found that nearly all the teachers were sadly deceiving themselves." (4) A college teacher inquired, "What are these oral themes that my son prepares in school? I don't wish to criticize, but my boy says he simply has to 'get up and spiel awhile.' He and I can't see the value of the time thus spent." (5 and 6) Two men, heads of departments in boarding schools, of long experience, successful, who are always on the lookout for new ways of getting results, wrote thus in answer to a request for their estimate of oral themes: (X) "I am rather indifferent, mainly, I think, because of lack of skill in getting results commensur-

ate with expenditure of time." (Y) " I attach little or no importance to oral themes. Written themes appear so infinitely more important that we give our time to them." (7) A state inspector of schools, when I asked him his opinion of the oral theme, answered with a question: "Is there such a thing?" He doubted whether it existed in his state. *And the doubt did not seem to dishearten him.*

Any average teacher can feel sure that he will educate a class by thorough work in writing, but many teachers fear that they cannot educate by oral work. Their "feeling" may not be valid; it may be a fancy. But at present they have to trust it. They fear that in oral themes they cannot enforce real mental work, cannot guide the speaker to a clean-cut responsibility. If all students were eager and able and conscientious in oral themes, that would make the classroom a different world; that might alter the whole conception of oral composition. But the teachers I speak of allow their feelings to be shaped by the classroom as it is, a place largely occupied by young citizens who are not specially eager, not very able, and not troubled by many pangs of conscience about "that composition stuff." The compulsion to responsibility must, in large measure, be supplied by the teacher, and can be brought to bear through written work. Bringing it to bear through oral work seems to these teachers an elusive process. They feel that they are not gripping a handle and wielding a tool.

Be doubtful of each report you hear that such a teacher in such a school was very successful. For it is a fact, though I have never read any comment on it, that two teachers of apparently equal ability, who use methods apparently similar, will have opposite results. One teacher finds that speaking is joyfully done and writing dreaded; another finds that speaking terrifies a school, while writing is done without protest. Schools differ completely in this regard. Dis-

cover what the tone and temper of your school is before you hasten to apply any method. The differences between schools is shown by the following experience epitomized from *English Evidence:* "I taught oral composition successfully in my first school and took my success for granted, as coming from a good method. When I moved to the next school, I found conditions so different that I had to give up the oral attempt."

E. The Undoubted Benefits of Oral Work

This must appear to you a very singular chapter, a negative and destructive one. Yet it has destroyed nothing except an easy and ignorant hopefulness; it has simply warned you not to expect splendid results by going through some motions. In this concluding section I will explain how a teacher of average ability in any ordinary school can use oral composition to secure priceless benefits for ordinary students.

The four previous sections have told you, in effect, not to suppose that an inexperienced teacher, working alone, will be sure to succeed with oral composition. That is the advice which you most need. Remember that it is not pessimism. There is no telling what roads to success you may find if you begin with caution, develop your method carefully, and keep your mind on classroom facts. What is more, you may not have to work alone. You may be in a well-organized teaching system that will give you definite instructions, providing for you a foundation of previous oral training and requiring of you only a reasonable amount of building toward next year's proficiency. There is no question, for example, that the oral campaign in Mr. Sheridan's schools is a grand success. His method is a complete one for all the first eight years, a gradual, thorough, coördinated effort by

a band of teachers who are organized in unity of purpose. If your ninth-year class has been trained by such a discipline, you may find oral composition very different from what it is to a majority of teachers.

Suppose that you have to begin work under the least favorable conditions, left to your own guidance and dealing with untrained students. Even so, there are two reasons why you may anticipate oral composition with enthusiasm.

In the first place, it is a way of training boys and girls to stand before an audience and say something without stage fright. That is a boon which every adult covets. In any town where you teach you can gather appealing testimony from parents that the ability to speak in public with some ease is precious. As you work in class to secure this power, you are not attempting anything mysterious or intricate, not aiming at any reformation of mental make-up. You are simply giving young people the opportunity to remove the quiver from their knees, the dryness from their mouths, the flurry and riot from their thoughts. You and the students need not worry about refinements of method and altruistic criticism. Though the early efforts may not be worthy of the name of "compositions," they are most valuable experiences in overcoming diffidence, in learning to be self-possessed before an audience.

In such work a motive is everything. If you merely impose oral composition as a task, much of your labor will be in vain. But if you can vivify the purpose of the work, you may rouse an interest that will accomplish something like a miracle. Use yourself as a terrible example of an educated person who never had the advantages of oral composition when you went to school. Tell the class of the time when you were called upon to speak to an audience and were so embarrassed that you could not do yourself justice. My

own story is of the time when I was a junior in school. I had been appointed spokesman of a committee to present a request to the faculty; my brain was in such a whirl that I broke down in the second sentence and could not recover. Only a little practice in fronting a class formally would have saved me that chagrin. Tell the class how some English teachers cannot trust themselves to speak oral compositions to a friendly convention of colleagues, but have to "read a paper," and how this paper trembles. Tell them that in discussions at such conventions English teachers often fail to make themselves heard, because they, poor things, never had any training in oral composition when they were at school. Tell them that when business and professional men hear about composition their minds jump to the oral part of the work, that these men think in terms of oral proficiency and desire for their children a training in being self-possessed before an audience. Let the class understand that oral composition is the most direct approach a school can make to the needs of real life. So, without much regard to structure or special skill, you may achieve a degree of success that will merit the gratitude of the community.

You may go a long way ahead of that reason for enthusiasm. Without striving for cleverness or any refinements whatever, you may teach the great majority of the class how to speak in decent sentences that are not introduced by aimless connective words and noises. That accomplishment may now seem very minimal to you and to the higher critics of your work, but in reality it is of immense significance. It has never been acquired by a considerable proportion of university lecturers. It is lamentably absent in the public efforts of many university graduates, people of importance, when they mount a platform and try to communicate ideas. Every one of them could have mastered

such rudiments of speech if a high-school teacher had trained him for a year. Tell your class some story of an able man with an interesting message who wearied his audience with halting bunches of words connected by uneasy sounds.

How much it means to be freed from these elementary weaknesses was once brought home to me in striking fashion by visiting two schools on consecutive days. In the first school the recitations were made with ejaculated words, punctuated with "uh-uh" sounds or "and-uh" mumblings. In the second school the recitations came in real sentences that contained no vexations. Those were the only differences—the sentences and the sounds. They are hardly more than mechanical differences, which any ordinary teacher can bring about in any ordinary class. Yet they were so great that the two classes seemed in different worlds of pedagogy. You have it in your power, even if you are a self-distrustful novice, to translate a class from one of those worlds to the other.

Perhaps I now seem as flamboyant as I seemed pessimistic in the first four sections of this chapter. I do not mean by the previous paragraph that you can transform students with ease or in a short time or completely. I only say that, if you are willing to work hard and long, you can show most of your students how to speak a series of real sentences. Such a humble alteration in habits is a transfer to a new world of composition.

When you first see a list of the rudiments that bring about such a change, you will be amazed, perhaps disheartened. Most of your efforts will center in these few small matters:

1. Make real sentences and show by a falling inflection when you have reached the end of each one.

2. Don't make any "transfer noise" while you pass from one sentence to the next. Keep still. Take time to think what the first words of the next sentence are to be. Speak those words clearly, without a preliminary "approaching sound."

3. Don't use *and.*

4. Don't use *so.*

To you, in your novitiate, those four items look woefully small. To you, when five years have passed, the items will seem mountain-high.

Of course you will find ways of extending this little program. You will learn that most students can be taught to begin occasional spoken sentences with adverb clauses or with phrases. Thus you will show them rhetorical embellishments of a high order. Can you conceive that mere bits of syntax deserve so grand a name? It is true. An occasional subordinating conjunction or preposition, well placed at the beginning of a sentence, is so pleasing that it may astound an inspector of schools. He may report that you are making famous progress in clear thinking and maturity of style. Here and there you may find chances to introduce into oral themes some of the devices that have been learned in written style: using sentences of different lengths and structures, indicating paragraphs (by a pause and a change of position), beginning incisively, closing with a sense of climax.

But be slow in undertaking such advances. Your best hope is to strive first for the rudiments and to realize how much they mean if they can be established. Propose them to yourself as an ambitious goal, without yearning to go beyond, and be happy—yes, you may properly feel triumphant—if you can bring the class to a mastery of them. Be assured that every one of your students who masters as

much as the little list of four minima will thank you all the days of his life.

Be a happy warrior as you enter upon a program of oral composition. There is not in all the negative sections of this chapter a sentence of discouragement. You should be glad that someone has shown you the illusions and told you where the false hopes lie. Now you will not be baffled by any vain, deluding, imaginary joys that turn to puffs of smoke when you lay hands on them. You will not expect to sail on a magic carpet to realms of charm and force, where commonplace boys and girls become enraptured of precise thinking and intense feeling. You will be cheerful in the world of facts. You will know that oral composition, within the boundary of a few definite rudiments, is a place where life can be made better for young people. You will not expect a revolution in intellects and souls, but will be happy in removing fetters from average minds and giving them freedom to express themselves.

CHAPTER XIII

VOCABULARY WORK

A. Increasing the Store of Words

For thirty-five years I have found the big dictionaries fascinating books. To learn new words and new meanings has been a vocation, and to learn my errors of pronunciation has been a sport. By all my instincts and experience I am a vocabulary-builder. So it was natural that when I began teaching I should think more about the work with words than about anything else in composition. I remember that I framed a plan, which I carried out for two months in one class, of introducing a derivation or shade of meaning each day. All composition is made of words; therefore, it is commonly argued, the greatest necessity for improving composition is the enlargement of the knowledge of words. This logic prevails in our profession and seems to dominate the thought of all the polite and learned world that advises us teachers.

A fair sample is the letter that Walter Lippmann once wrote to the New York City Association of Teachers of English, in answer to a request for his advice and stimulus. His thousand-word essay was entirely concerned with words. The following extracts represent the gist of it: The italics are Mr. Lippmann's.

If you ask an ordinary movie audience in New York City to tell you the name of natural objects, you know what the response would be. How many stars could they recognize and name?

How many plants? How many trees, how many animals, how many parts of their own bodies? You find, I think, that the purely urban person has almost no sense of and no words for the main activities by which he is fed, clothed, housed, transported, or even amused. . . . Yet the business of living in what Graham Wallas calls the Great Society is an ever greater tax on the imagination. For the bulk of public questions deal with matters that are out of sight, and have, therefore, to be imagined. These questions are reported to us in the thin and colorless language of the newspapers. We read this language, and unless we read it with a mind stored with concrete images, we can come to no true realization of what it all means. . . . *Nothing is more certain than that the teaching of English in the public school is a critical factor in the whole affair.* . . . Our social life depends, therefore, on people who use words without confusion as to their meaning, to whom the name of this and that is the name of this and that, and not of half a dozen vaguely related things as well. It depends on people who do not mistake general terms for objective facts, on people who can penetrate phrases like Bolshevism, socialism, democracy, liberalism, radicalism, Americanism, and can arrive at candid, vivid understanding of the particular persons, acts, hopes, fears that these omnibus words are supposed to cover. . . .

To teach English in a community like ours is to be dealing every day with the main instrument of civilized living. To give that instrument edge and point and temper is a sacred task.

Mr. Lippmann wrote an excellent essay, for which the New York teachers were grateful; it was widely copied and praised. It tells us that our principal business is to enlarge the vocabulary and to sharpen the discrimination of the senses of words.

If we drop from this journalistic height to the level of what business men say about high-school English, we shall see the same flourishing of the same idea. I open *English and Business*, a report made by a special committee of the New York City Board of Education (1923) and find that

the first testimony cited is from the Department of Training of R. H. Macy and Co. The executive in charge gives five main opinions about the aims that are best in business for improving composition: to use simple and correct language, not stereotyped language, a purpose in language, dynamic phrases, "good English."

I have yet to see any similar analysis which is not centered around that "good English." Yet in the face of all this unquestioned theory and unassailable logic and my own prepossessions I can only shake my head and say, "Not proven." I know that in France a great deal is made of vocabulary work, such as adding new words, studying homonyms and antonyms; and I have no reason for doubting that the work is well rewarded. But I encounter no similar evidence in this country. There must be teachers who secure results; it is not conceivable that all the elaborate exercises in textbooks and all the reverence for Professor Palmer's *Self-cultivation* come to naught. I merely report that in my goings to and from in the country I have not seen the results. This is either an extraordinary situation or a lamentable failure of my eyesight. In either case I am doing you a service by showing you once more that you should put no trust in any common theory or in any manual of advice. The business of this chapter is to present two or three quarts of the data I have gathered.

I will say, first off, that the failure with our vocabulary work is probably a temporary condition, that some time we may learn the art. A friend in whom I have confidence tells me that he is learning it, that it requires "some skill" and that "further experiment" is necessary; his results this year lead him to plan for one day a week of vocabulary exercise in future. He has been years in reaching this conclusion and in learning how to work. This section is animated by his spirit of caution, not by pessimism. It gives

my personal reasons, which may be distorted, for believing that just at present very few schools are securing results by any of the customary exercises with increasing the word-store. My friend is in a school with a very high standard of scholarship; he would feel as I do about vocabulary work for a novice in less favorable circumstances.

An indication that this feeling may be right is to be seen in *English Evidence.* I urged a class of eighty-five teachers, many of them experienced, to write the very best descriptions they could of their work with building vocabulary; the cream of this best is published; I do not think it will persuade you that success is sure in our present degree of proficiency.

It is a fair guess that much of the trust in vocabulary building is based on the Grand Literary Tradition, which was true once in school, which may be true again (in a different way), but which is not feasible in an age when we have to fight for existence against illiteracy. There is the heart of the matter. If, in this age, I use time for introducing new words and cultivating a sense of their values, I must leave the class without sentence sense. Three illustrations will show why I think so. (1) A boy once testified thus to me in a theme describing his eighth-grade work in another school (note his punctuation): "This year we have not done much writing as we had some large words to digest among them, 'Campanology', 'Peripatetic'." (2) I once visited a ninth-grade class, in a system of good schools, that had been spending three months on word-study and was taking a final test; the pupils were supposed to have appropriated words like *dolorous, éclat, prorate, qui vive, superfluous,* etc.; they were engaged in telling the distinctions between *adjacent* and *adjoining, abandon* and *desert, detest* and *abhor, niggardly* and *parsimonious.* (3) The Illinois

schools are required to enlarge the vocabularies of seventh-grade children by teaching the definitions of *cabal, cantonment, cerebrum, clique, corolla, crevasse, deciduous,* etc.

A Lippmann in a junior high school might secure results by skill in choosing better forms of exercises. He might. But, since there has never been a Lippmann teaching in a school, I will not encourage you to play with surmises. If every high-school class were taught by an accomplished specialist in word values, results might be secured in vocabulary-building. That is conceivable. If a majority of our students felt respectful toward the process of grafting synonymic knowledge upon them, results would be possible. In short, if the school world were something that it is not, this section would not be what it is. In the actual high schools that the United States has at present there is a considerable proportion of teachers who cannot distinguish between *altogether* and *all together*, and a very large majority of students who feel that the instruction they receive in diction is not a part of real life. I can say, for my part, that my third of a century spent in communion with the dictionaries has not enabled me to explain to tenth-year boys the distinction between *detest* and *abhor.* I am not sufficiently educated to carry out the vocabulary program of the rural schools of Illinois. And if I make the effort to teach word treasures adequately, I shall leave *too* and *separate* and the period untaught.

We are eager for the heaven-kissing hills of pedagogy, and spurn the earth. We hold lovingly to the Tradition of prim, aristocratic Victorian days, and avert our gaze from "had of went." The Lippmanns elevate our thoughts to the high calling of teaching children that symbols are not things, a task so sublimely difficult that only the rarest minds in law and economics and political science can now begin to

wrestle with it; and the Lippmanns are not interested in the fact that one-third of our high-school graduates who go to college cannot tell a phrase from a sentence. The Lippmanns are not interested in these facts: that many teachers, if encouraged to do vocabulary work, will dwell upon *peripatetic*, that no method is yet devised to prevent them, that no authority has planned any sort of consecutive vocabulary work which has been tested by experience, that all the world of English teaching is permeated with the most fantastic illusions about right and wrong in words, that the good results of vocabulary-building under present conditions are few and doubtful, that the ills can be seen almost anywhere you choose to look.

If that last sentence were detached from context and printed by an adverse reviewer, he could make it appear that I am a loud and reckless person. I have just considered softening it down, so as to make his work harder. But the sentence is true; let it stand. What I mean by "fantastic illusions" will appear in the next section. When I say "few and doubtful," I am well aware of all the sensible, useful work that a majority of teachers know how to do by calling attention to new words in a literature lesson and making them usable by an ordinary class. I am not speaking of any such natural extension of lessons in literature, but of all the enginery of hoisting up quantities of new words and imbedding them in the minds of twentieth-century American youth. Anyhow, I must not try to dodge a reviewer who wants to take a fall out of me, but must address you, bound for Smithboro to begin your first year of teaching, planning to do your best for all the Roberts and Marys there, hoping to earn a trip to the Lake Country next summer. To you I will declare—not positively, but as a strong possibility—that if you spend much time with the "vocabulary building" which you expect as a matter of course, your results will be

woefully small. And probably there will be another and much more disheartening result: parents and principal will fear that you are rather highfalutin, impractical (that is the word they will use), and old-fashioned. There will probably be an even more distressing result: the boys and girls of Smithboro will be further confirmed in a suspicion, now of several years' standing in their minds, that English is not a real part of modern life, but a code of ancient and artificial etiquette.

Some time I want to write an essay on the ineffable unrealities of vocabulary as it is now taught in many places. I should write it and interpolate it here if this book were not growing unconscionably long. A few glimpses will be given in the next section. Your imagination will carry you far toward the truth if you will muse for five minutes on *surreptitious*, *equivocation*, and *implication* after I tell you about the ambitious boy who added *circumvent* to his vocabulary. He described a tramp whose neck was "circumvented by a dirty bandanna," and he would not listen to my narrow and pedantic argument that he was logically right but otherwise wrong.

I should like to write another essay on Vocabulary Myths, which would begin with this quotation from a recent textbook: "It is interesting to know that the average business man has a vocabulary of only a few hundred words." That statement or its equivalent, has passed current in textbooks during my whole lifetime. But Professor Edward L. Thorndike, of Columbia, says, "The ordinary graduate from the eighth grade knows more than eight thousand words." Muse for another five minutes on the unquestioning faith with which the pure fabrication about "only a few hundred" has been accepted and gravely printed in a hundred books that are put into the hands of trustful teachers like yourself to aid them in improving composition. Our human race,

when it deals with the exalted hopes of education, seems unable to pay any heed to facts; for a ten-minute experiment with a fact like a pocket dictionary would prove the falsity of the myth. But we do not test our pedagogy by facts; we repeat what has been said before. Can you see a possibility that other portions of the vocabulary creed are mythical?

Don't muse when you reach Smithboro. Get in contact with those hundred live young facts who form your classes; see with your own eyes what the vocabulary work ought to be. As the year goes by, keep asking yourself this question: "What chance is there that a word, hastily and artificially stuck into a student's mind, will take root there?" I feel creepy when I think of the act. A word is alive, with all manner of rootlets of connotation. I should suppose that if I "built" it into a vocabulary I should be training students to think it was like any dead stick. Perhaps it is only my lack of skill that makes me think so.

There is, however, one kind of vocabulary work for which we all have moderate skill and which will have to be done in Smithboro—the minimal kind—for example, making sure that *accept* is added to the word-store, in lieu of certain uses of *except*. Visible results can be obtained by adding to the word-store such humble staples as *yet*, *each* (in place of a continual *both*), *into*, the verb *lie*, *likely*, and *the way* for *like*. It is not impossible that you will have to descend as low as certain past tenses which have never been appropriated in the vocabularies of many of the class—*did*, *saw*, *drowned*, etc. Perhaps the summit of your effective minimal work will be substitutes for the carry-all words like *nice*, *wonderful*, *get*, *fix*. Can you conceive that these common pebbles of speech are treasures fit for a word-store? You will understand after you have lived in the storeroom for two years.

B. "Good English"

After writing the title of this section I have been gazing out of my window for a few minutes, not seeing what was in the landscape, but observing a flock of thoughts that are wheeling for entrance to this first paragraph. One might do as well as another, but I must make a choice. Let it be the story of "The *As Though* Man." We were packed, two hundred of us, in a hotel parlor on a sweltering day, listening to the set speeches that preceded a discussion at an English section of a National Education meeting. The chairman had announced emphatically that all who spoke in the discussion must limit themselves to four minutes. The last set speech was drawing to a close. I saw a man at the front of the room working to the edge of his chair, poised for a spring to get the floor. He succeeded. Then began an impassioned plea against two cases of bad English that were corrupting the mother-tongue in his state. He spoke with ability and earnestness; he was a superintendent of schools with a message. You, in contact with a mere printed page, cannot appreciate the seriousness of the occasion. For the allotted four minutes the eloquence against two idioms went on, but was still incomplete after five minutes, after six, after eight. The idioms were *as though* and *all that sort of thing.* I sat in wonderment, spellbound. For in all my acquaintance with lists of "bad English" I had never heard these two locutions called in question. I was like an astronomer hearing of a new comet, or a doctor hearing of a new antitoxin.

That is the sort of experience that you will have every year if you study wrong uses of words. You never learn all the pitfalls of diction, but realize more and more the perils of ignorance that lurk in every sentence you utter. Most teachers in the audience were probably as ignorant as I,

and I could guess how they were feeling hot and cold as the conviction of their sins was brought home to them. Years afterward I encountered a woman who had been in the audience and asked her what proportion of the audience she supposed took the sermon to heart and tabooed *as though* in their classes thereafter. She guessed ninety per cent, which was probably not too high.

The objection to *as though* is a figment of the imagination. That compound conjunction was an established idiom in Chaucer's time and has retained an honorable station to this day. There is no more wisdom in attacking it than in preaching against *though*. As for *all that sort of thing*, it may be as needless and tiresome as *and*, but it is no more wrong than *and*. The only way to prove that it is bad English would be to prove that ninety-nine per cent of the cultured speakers of America and England have less knowledge of good speech than this one rather uncultured theorist.

Of course you wonder how the theorist could arrive at such a notion, which is opposed to our whole body of good usage. If you really wish to understand, you have only to look inside your own mind at this moment and see what goes on there when I ask you what errors you see in the following sentences:

1. Firstly, its style was not agreeable.
2. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are lengthy poems.
3. The other boy has got no father.

What did your mind do when it decided that *firstly* is "bad"? Have you any knowledge about this word? Search and spare not. If you can see why your own mind declares that a word is wrong, you can understand a mystery which is hidden from the great majority of teachers. Have you observed in three hundred good books that *firstly* does not occur? Can you certify that in the careful speech of

fifty cultured people it never occurs? What information have you with which to convict the poor word of badness? Find the definite basis for your verdict and write it down; for if you merely frame it vaguely to yourself, you will shortly be saying, "Oh, well, I didn't mean exactly," and so you will lose all the benefit of this experiment. Write for each of the three words some such statement as these: "*Firstly* is an error because Miss Corrigo used to forbid us to use it. *Lengthy* is a vulgarism because the book I used to study says so. *Has got* is improper because it sounds wrong and because *got* is unnecessary."

When you have your reasons on a slip of paper, observe closely what sort of response your mind makes to the following statements, which are true: Byron wrote the first sentence; Sir Charles W. C. Oman, a famous historian of Oxford, wrote the second; Ik Marvel wrote the third. Make some such definite record of your state of mind as this: "Byron was often careless; the fact that he once used *firstly* doesn't prove anything."

Now note how your mind acts when it reads this paragraph. The sentences on page 380 are from *English Usage*, by Professor J. Lesslie Hall, in which he presents evidence from literature that each of one hundred forty-one debated idioms has been in reputable use. *Firstly* has been used by Dickens, Sir William Hamilton, Charlotte Brontë, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, George Meredith; *lengthy* has been used by Clough, George Eliot, Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, and four others; the unnecessary *got* with *have* has been used by Goldsmith, Lamb, Hood, Carlyle, Thackeray, Ruskin, and eight others. Hall simply records the cases he has seen; his brief lists do not imply that many other authors have not also sanctioned the words. Hall, for example, has noted only one use of *firstly* in the *Britannica;* I have seen four.

If you now notice carefully what is going on in your mind, you will see something like this: "Even the laxness of a good many authors doesn't turn wrong into right. People who respect the purity of the language should judge by some real standard that is superior to individuals." And that is the reason why a man can think that *as though* is wrong. Somewhere he found a standard that was superior to individuals; by that standard *as though* was declared wrong; and therefore it is wrong, despite any evidence you can pile before him. No jury of the most competent philologists can ever convince him that *as though* is proper. He accepts a moral law of diction, which is above reason, above usage, above logic, above every argument that can be made.

In your brain there has always been a belief in such a law—a vague belief, to be sure, but strong. It has no foundation. It is a superstition. If you do not destroy it, you will be to some extent the same sort of unreasoning zealot that you have just been laughing at. Don't grow excited and deny this; don't suddenly accept it and declare a revolution in your mind; but register it and test it as you grow in knowledge. Don't be afraid of it because you have met it first in this book, for it is now very generally taught by most academic authorities who are fit guides for teachers. Read Hall's book; read Lounsbury's *Schoolmastering the Speech;* look up parts of Mencken's *The American Language;* learn the opinions of men like F. N. Scott, Brander Matthews, Jespersen. There is no standard for diction except the facts of usage.

The best illustration of the nature of usage is clothing. We may speak of "correctly dressed" and "the wrong style," but we never mean seriously that there is any moral law of clothes, any standard above the mere facts of what people customarily wear. We may be inclined to argue in these days that hoop-skirts were wrong by the general laws

of good taste, but there was no such law in 1860, and never will be. Irate elderly gentlemen in 1918 appealed to a general law of modesty when they saw skirts growing short, but there is no such law, and never can be. Modesty in dress is correspondence with the customs of the time and place. To play golf in shirt-sleeves is immodest in England; to go to a formal dinner in shirt-sleeves is immodest in America; to wear a bathing-suit on the street is immodest, but to wear it on the beach is modest. There never has been among men, and never will be, a law of clothes which says that any piece of apparel is, in itself at all times, wrong. No more has there ever been such a law of language.

But what people *think about* apparel is a rigid law, binding, inescapable. I must wear a dinner-coat in these circumstances, or I shall be boorish; in those surroundings I must on no account wear a dinner-coat, or I shall be a laughing-stock. The coat is the same; the custom varies like a wanton breeze. So it is with words. If I were writing this section to be read in England, I should not dare to use *bloody* as an illustration, for custom has made it utterly improper there; but here we can smile at the queer British prejudice against the word. In Bangor it is wrong to say "talk like we do"; in New Orleans it is right to use the expression.

Can you agree with that shifting code of right and wrong? Probably not. But in proportion as you can adjust to it and accept it you will be a better apostle of good English in the community where you work. Do you detect a little hot spark of indignation, a resentment at the idea that your standards of right and wrong should fluctuate? If so, no persuasion of mine will accomplish anything. Take yourself in hand and argue thus with yourself: "If a prim, self-satisfied man came to my town from London and shook his finger at me and told me it was naughty to say 'I am all

through with the paper,' how should I feel? Should I humbly yield and be ashamed and begin to train myself by his standard?" It is so pleasant to be a missionary and tell people their sins; how about your feelings when you are the heathen listening to a missionary scold you? Until you put yourself in the heathen's place, you will not be fit to teach children about a choice of words.

I should not take space for this question as a mere matter of words. It is far deeper; it goes to the root of your efficiency as a teacher. Suppose that you are in a community where all the other teachers and the ministers and the members of the school board use *like* as a conjunction, and that you righteously tell the children how "bad" this use is, and that you exhort them to give up the bad habit and to be pure and to say "as if it was." You will not alter the speech habits of Smithboro's best people; you will not alter the speech habits of the students; you will not be respected for your knowledge of English. You will be considered a stuck-up meddler with the customs of people who are just as good as you are; and when you have acquired this reputation, your efficiency as a teacher will be reduced about seventy-five per cent. I trust this brief paragraph may convey a long message.

Now, as a salve for the wounds I have inflicted upon your sense of propriety in the use of words, I will devote the next paragraph to the other side of the question. For in diction there are two sides, as in several phases of English; and both should be understood. What I have thus far said, and what I shall say beyond the next paragraph, is the side that needs emphasis; it is the side that is less known and that promotes efficiency. The other side can be sufficiently explained in one paragraph, which I will set apart from the rest of this section and which might well have a heading: "THERE *IS* A STANDARD OF CORRECTNESS."

I can best explain the standard of correctness by means of an example. Suppose that I am teaching in a state where almost all the leading citizens habitually use "seems like it was," and suppose that I decline to fight this prevailing custom in language. The decision, as a matter of tactics, is wise policy. But it leaves students uninformed of an important fact about their mother-tongue—to wit: "seems like it was" has not been used by the authors and careful editors of this state; it is not used by high-school students in some other states, who would think it a queer way to talk; a majority of the educated people of the country shudder at the expression; it has never been, anywhere, an accepted literary idiom. High-school students ought to have this information. If a teacher puts the emphasis on *informing* students, he will not antagonize local feelings. He could always present the general standard of correctness in a reasonable and persuasive way by talking somewhat in this fashion: "If one of you, five years from now, made a talk to a Rotary Club in the state of ——— and used 'seems like it was,' he might cause three-fourths of his audience to shrug their shoulders. People there have the same feeling about 'seems like it was' that we people here have about 'ain't got none.' A good high school ought to give you this *information*, so that you can be better fitted for life." Such temperateness—just because it is cold-blooded fact, and not preaching—will be far more likely to penetrate the bosom of Master Ben Adams than any appeal to linguistic conscience. How far you should go in giving such information is a question that can be answered only by your tact. My advice would be in a negative form: Go no farther than you feel absolutely obliged to go.

Now I will resume my attack on the moral law in diction. In the next two sentences I will express very temperately

an idea which is trite, but is unknown to some teachers. A person who is not sensitive to the shifting standards of right and wrong is a prig who has no sense of word values. His whole career will be to rouse animosities and to damage the cause of good English.

The superstition about a moral standard of right in diction is probably a branch of the Grand Literary Tradition. In the days when only the favored and stylistic few were admitted to the temple of rhetoric there arose, quite naturally and properly, the warnings against locutions that were inelegant. It was the business of every polished writer to avoid even the slightest bit of bad taste in words; hence it was the principal business of every academic adviser to compile a list of idioms that were under suspicion. When Bryant was an editor and wished to have his paper keep a high standard, his way of going to work was to post the idioms that would not be tolerated. This negative way of assuring excellent style became the model for rhetorics. It has prevailed as a textbook custom to our own day. Modern lists are not made by men sensitive to recent alterations in fashion, but are copied from older lists, and so are largely catalogs of what was once true, but is now antique rubbish—what S. A. Leonard once called in the *English Journal* "Old Purist Junk." He is a professor and can say what he likes; I have to be careful.

The dicta in the lists are largely junk even for you and me when we are polishing our own professional vocabularies. That is one standard. Think, then, what it is when we are talking about a standard for the boys and girls. There is where your thoughts must be directed if you are to see this subject straight. How important are the purisms for high school? There is a still lower and more important standard: the bare essentials of composition. We work in an age when the barest elements of composition remain untaught, when

universities have to form classes for spelling and the rudiments of punctuation. We are finding a method of minimum essentials the only way to success, and the whole point of the method is to decide what topics are of elementary necessity. Probably there is no way in which lists of essentials are so much endangered as by crowding into them, for special emphasis with under-educated boys, a load of purist junk.

The rules for *shall* and *should* will illustrate. The last five presidents of the United States have not been able to follow the first simple principle of this rule, which requires *shall* and *should* in the first person to denote mere futurity. The most skilful writer of the five was the least acquainted with the rule, for he frequently wrote in his most carefully considered official utterances such sentences as "We *would* be recreant to our duty if we failed in this." I once found a dozen cases of flat violation of this simplest rule for *shall* in a rhetoric that devoted two pages to a summary of all the rules. Yet many a school bends its energies to these antique niceties as if they were essential rudiments. If you have any sense of pathos, avoid such folly.

Try to conceive, though it will be hard to do so, that in this section I am understating the futility of most of our work with "choice of words." Wiser men than I have not been able to restrain themselves in the presence of the endless folly and ignorance that go to the propagating of "good English." Only a long chapter could present the proof; I have space for only one exhibit of evidence.

I will go through the first full page of "Correct Usage" in the latest textbook I have seen, which is reputed to be among the best of its kind and which shows evidence of a real effort to bring the judgments down to date and not to be finical. My objections are not aimed at the author; for he, poor fellow, had to record what the market demands. I am choosing the page because it is enlightened compared

with some others and because it reflects current opinions about "good English." I will preface my comments by reminding you of the meanings of two terms that the dictionaries use for describing the status of words. "Vulgar" may not mean more to a lexicographer than "used by the common people," but to some teachers and to all students it means "indecent." No amount of defining and explaining "vulgarism" in your classes will remove the sting of the word. "Colloquial" means in a dictionary "used in conversation, without vulgarity, by cultured people, but not suitable for elevated style." Most teachers seem to regard "colloquial" as the equivalent of "suitable only for rowdyish talk." They fail to realize what a very lofty and literary standard a dictionary uses when it labels meanings as colloquial or vulgar.

The page before me offers objections to sixteen uses. Probably four of these would be considered gross blunders even by a violent anti-purist: *anywheres, borned, bunch* (for *crowd*), *bursted.* What a proof we have here that all our teaching of diction is a gallimaufry! Our age compels this author to put into a rather advanced book the cautions against three forms which are too degraded to be even mentioned in the large dictionaries that try to enter all sorts of slang and errors. In the present conditions of our education we cannot count that these low-lived words have been eradicated before the high-school age. Yet even among these four we had best observe caution. Before you loose your wrath against "bunch of fellows," read what is said in the next section about slang; before you scorn *bursted,* know what right the *Oxford Dictionary* has to say, "In the U. S. the past tense and participle are frequently *bursted,* vulgarly *busted*"; and know what *The American Language* says about *busted.* Don't suppose that boys will accept your judgment, or that you will help the good cause of pure

English, unless you can feel a friendly, scientific interest in this rude form. It won't mind your refined suppositions at all; neither will the boys and girls, unless you ally some public opinion on your side.

Seven of the sixteen uses are very far from being gross blunders. (1) "I don't know *as* I will" is said by the *Century* to be dialectal now, though it has an ancient and logical ancestry. What troubled me once when I accused a boy of using dialect was that he called my attention to the fact that Mrs. T used it; she was an old lady of impeccable speech, brought up in the straitest sect of Bostonese purity, and the wife of a professor who was a colleague of the professor who called it "dialect." I lost interest in the contest against "don't know *as*." It is used so regularly by the Professors at Yale and Harvard and Columbia that I have never been able to revive my interest. (2) *Aught* is said to be wrong for *naught* (meaning a cipher). Perhaps it is, because the Oxford says *ought* is a "vulgar corruption" of *nought*. But then the dictionary goes on to quote this vulgar corruption from a book by a very, very scholarly gentleman, Sir George Webbe Dasent: "Units were taken for oughts, and oughts added to units." The *Standard* enters *ought* as meaning a cipher, explaining that it is a corruption; but so are the words *adder* and *apron* corruptions of the same sort. How am I to keep my face straight while I tell Reuben that *ought* is bad English? (3) We must avoid *auto* in formal writing. Doubtless true. But what one of my students is going to write formally? You are resentful if you catch me writing formally even in this book for teachers. (4) *Awful* and *awfully* are improprieties when used for *extremely*. I should certainly like to have them put in jail, but the world has no sympathy whatever for my antipathy; every well-dressed, educated woman I know is completely dependent on "awfully nice of you to say so"

and "a perfectly awful time, don't you know." Who am I to reveal to the daughters of these women that their mothers are "improper"? (5) I quite agree that *because* is poorly used to introduce a noun clause ("the reason is because I overslept"), and I once said so in print. For this opinion I was called a purist by the man who made the rhetoric that I used when I began to teach. Apparently I was a purist. I decided to quit pressing my prejudices upon boys who haven't yet mastered every one of the minima. (6) *Any place* ("I can't find it any place") is called a vulgarism, and I have no evidence to prove it respectable except that many people who are my elders and betters use it. Here is a fit subject for debate between two experts in diction. It is none of my affair in a school. (7) It is incorrect to say "she feels badly." How did this man ever detect a fact that is hidden from the last two professors of English to whom I have listened? They are men of higher academic authority than he and would not be interested in his little rule, which is based on logic: "Since *badly* is an adverb, it must not be used for the predicate adjective *bad*." The rule has a much firmer basis—the fact that no dictionary recognizes any adjectival meaning of *badly*. Would the two professors mend their ways if I went to them as a missionary, showed the evidence against them, and pleaded with them to help me uphold pure English? They would not.

The other five uses on this page are accredited by the best dictionaries as colloquial or better: *badly* in the sense of very much, *balance* meaning the rest, *besides* as a preposition, *to blame on*, *brainy*.

So the whole page, which is a fair sample of all the twelve pages of this section of the textbook, reduces to this: four gross errors that imply a lack or preparation for any high-school English, twelve questionable meanings that some

professors of English use before their classes and would defend. No hint is given on this page that there are two classes of correctness, as different as bricks are from the tassels on a lamp-shade. Without a mastery of the first class we cannot have any house of English to dwell in; without the little fussy things of the other class we can be very comfortable and respectable. Remember that you are making an English home for boys. If you can win them, the girls will be safe. Remember that boys are only boys and cannot understand your love of certain dear little dictional dudads that have seemed so important to you. A boy cannot like them. They cause many a boy to run away from good English and dwell in the tents of the wicked.

C. Slang

What effect is produced in you by the following judgments about slang? "The habitual use of slang is a sign of low breeding or of affected rowdiness." "In polite conversation we should avoid it altogether." "It is a grave offense against good use." Are you expecting to talk like that to the young people of Smithboro?

Before you resolve to stamp out slang in any school reflect upon another judgment about slang. It was published in the gravest of pedagogical journals—*Educational Review*. It is not a product of this present slap-dash age, but was printed in 1892. The writer was not an irreverent journalist, but a professor of literature in an old university, a man whose name is a synonym for all that is refined and soft-voiced and well-bred.

Schoolmasters' English—the English which boys writing themes are taught to use—is carefully denuded of all peculiarities, and among other things which it holds in horror is slang. Pedants,

prigs, purists, precisians, and all dry-witted and thin-witted persons naturally hate slang, because it is alive. But men of rich natures love slang. It is the wild game of language. It abounds in imagination, humor, strength, comes warm from the lips of people, and is the fresh product of the creative impulse by which all language was originally made.

Don't decide impulsively to talk like that in Smithboro, for those are the extreme words of a man who is pleading for one side of a truth. Slang, as used by our students, does not abound in imagination, and is not the product of a creative impulse; it is the opposite of all that is imaginative and creative. But decide to keep in mind this violent defense of slang and to use it in your dealings with boys. Every professor of literature that I know uses slang; some of the least rowdyish of them use it to good purpose in their lectures. They like to keep abreast of the very latest slang. If they ever indulged in any conversation so "polite" that slang was inadmissible, they would consider the occasion a farce. Do you know any educated man who does not frequently use slang? If so, what do you think of him?

The world has always been as full of slang as it is now, and as thickly populated with Knights of Purity who keep vigils to preserve our speech from slang. Our poor mother-tongue has always been on the brink of the abyss of slang. It always will be there. But we may compose ourselves for sleep each night, confident that it will not topple to ruin.

If you preach against slang in Smithboro, you are lost; and your preaching will do more to harm good English than you can undo in other ways. Be honest and ally yourself with the facts. People who have a good education are always conscious when they use slang. That is your first weapon against it. A girl who uses slang unwittingly is "queer." The second weapon is that people with alert wits never use slang in a weak, aimless, bedraggled, tiresome way, forever

and forever repeating the same stale, wearisome phrase. The boy who relies on slang is dull. Students will not respond to any plea for "purity," because their minds are honest and direct, not deceived (as we older people may be) by a sleazy theory. But students will respond to the plain fact that they are queer or dull if they use slang carelessly.

D. Pronunciation

When I was nineteen years old, a friend informed me that my pronunciation *ăl'mond* was wrong. Very much chagrined, I looked in "the" dictionary and found, sure enough, that the correct pronunciation was *ahmond.* So I dutifully trained my tongue to the new sounds. A few years later a new dictionary appeared, and there I learned that I might have my choice. The *Century Dictionary* tells us that the only correct pronunciation of *octopus* is with the accent on *to,* yet nineteen of the *Standard's* jury of twenty-five put the accent on *oc.* In the good old days all scrupulous people knew that the noun *cement* must be accented on the first syllable and that the noun *rise* must rime with *rice.* They knew dozens of correct pronunciations, like *abdo' men, accli'mate, squālor, demon'strate, chival'ric, ar'butus.* Correct pronunciation was a game, played thus: find some word like *illustrate,* which all your educated friends pronounced *il'lustrate;* learn that the correct pronunciation is *illus'trate;* ask them to say the word; tell them their mistake; watch their embarrassment; feel a glow of pride in your superior knowledge.

A teacher once asked me about the correct pronunciation of *garage.* I replied, "There is no such thing as a correct pronunciation." She was mystified and offended. Next day she returned to the topic: "But what pronunciation is right?" She could not comprehend my effort to explain

that some people say it like a French word, that some use semi-French sounds, and that some Anglicize to rime with *marriage*. She could hardly have been more perplexed if I had said that some people are murderers, that some only connive at murder, while others abstain from murder. In her mind, you see, it was an axiom that some moral law, superior to all human weakness, decrees that one pronunciation is right and that all other pronunciations are wrong. She will always remain steadfast in that faith. So perhaps will you, regarding me as a losel.

But I am nothing of the sort. When I learned three years ago about the correct pronunciation of *Magyar*, I was mortified and shall never mispronounce it again. When a young man instructed me a few weeks ago about *buoyant*, I humbly accepted the evidence and returned to the boyish way of saying it which I had abandoned for false reasons. I am much concerned about pronunciations, and I recognize standards.

"The" dictionary is no standard, for there are four great dictionaries, and not one of them has authority to convict you of ignorance. It may even happen that the unanimous verdict of all four is not valid authority. They all assert that the verb *combat* must be accented on the first syllable, but that gives such an uncombative sound that it seems to be little used except by people who rely on a printed moral law. The fact is that all manner of highly educated people say *combat'*. Therefore it would be folly for me to say that they are all ignorant. They are the living fact of correct pronunciation: the dictionaries are repositories of embalmed opinion. Unless I know that very few educated people use a certain pronunciation, I do not know that it is incorrect. The only wrong pronunciation is the one which shows that I have not noticed good usage. If I hear a boy say *mauso'-leum*, I ought to save him from future embarrassment by

telling him that his pronunciation is never heard in the learned world; but I dare not tell him to put a hard *g* in *oleomargarine* just because all the dictionaries tell him to do what few of my acquaintances do.

So much for the philosophy of pronunciation as it applies to us teachers for our own guidance. Which wrong pronunciations are worth your while in school? Probably a few common vulgarisms are worth while such as *git, hev, ketch, feller*. But remember that these are ingrained in the very fibers of the brain, that they have the social sanction of the community, that lasting results are excessively difficult to secure, that time spent in this way may prevent success with the other minima. And remember that good sense is always prone to desert anyone who draws up a list of vulgar sounds to be eradicated from speech. Would you include "donchew" for *don't you?* Then you are asserting that ninety-nine per cent of university professors speak vulgarly. In fact the truth probably is that to sound the *t* and the *y* cleanly when the question begins unemphatically is an ignorant affectation. I once heard a fastidious man say that to make a gap between *at* and *all* was a sure sign of an uneducated theorizer. Among refined people who do not talk by theory it is customary to pronounce *did you* as "didju." Attend to social facts like these before deciding what pronunciations are worthy of your time in an English class that knows little grammar and less punctuation.

Occasionally you will hear an unfamiliar word pronounced in a barbarous way and will take a moment to set the speaker right. What is there to do with familiar words? My answer is, strange as it will seem to you, "Almost nothing." If you have theories in favor of the Italian *a* in *half*, of the short *o* in *dog*, of the long *u* in *Tuesday*, of the full *g* sound in *doing*, of three syllables in *history*, you will

wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against all the principalities and powers of the outraged senses of a community that has a perfect right to its own ways of talking. Reflect that certain aristocratic circles in England consider it a sign of caste to say *goin'* and *doin';* that most healthy professors of English resent the affectations of the "correct" way of saying "Last Tuesday my aunt asked me."

You will understand the possibilities of wrong judgment in teaching pronunciation if you know that the teachers of a great city have been urged, by a responsible and deliberate committee, to use "practical suggestions for improving speech conditions" by training students to say; bȧth, hälf, mŏral, rōōt, diuty, bangquet, gladi′olus, squālor. Think of that way of using time when you are tempted to reform pronunciation in your school.

There is another reason for caution in pronunciation, an unworthy one perhaps, but necessary to consider in this practical world: the results you secure will hardly be prized by parents.

In planning for work with sounds or meanings of words don't consult your own tastes and don't dwell upon what you might accomplish if you had all the time you wanted. The time for the many and varied demands of English is short. If you use it for sounds and meanings, you cannot have it for minimum essentials.

CHAPTER XIV

THEME WORK

Most of this chapter applies to oral themes as well as to written, but for convenience I shall speak in terms of writing. The teacher who thinks of the two kinds of themes as two separate arts is misleading students. A theme is a piece of construction, whether it is spoken or written; and the oral theme must be based on the same careful planning that is required for a written form. "A theme" should suggest to the student an orderly composition, which may be delivered orally or may be penned.

A. Assigning Topics

Many teachers' hearts beat high when they approach a list of theme topics. Their feeling seems to be: "Ah, here is the solution. Here is the recipe for putting life into students and making them happy in theme-writing." I have often felt the thrill of a new list of subjects, especially if they are original and whimsically expressed, as in the articles on "what to write about," by Easley S. Jones, which appeared during several years in the Illinois *Bulletin*. "Students," he says, "are like leaky pumps; they have to be primed." After giving a list of topics under "the earliest things I can remember"—such as "falling down stairs," "scraping the cake-pan," "the sunbonnet the pigs ate"—he remarks, "The teacher will read these lists aloud, indicating the most promising titles, and by such comments as 'Here's a boy who has a gold mine of subjects' or 'This

girl has had more adventures than a pirate' convince even the skeptical ones that they have more ideas than they think they have." Mr. Jones is now making a book of this sort of matter. If you want a zestful priming of your own topic-pump, find out about it.

A book which has given me many good hints is Bernard M. Sheridan's *Speaking and Writing English.* This is limited to one-paragraph compositions for grades 2-8 and will seem to you very childish when you first open it; but most teachers to whom I have shown it agree with me that the author's skill and shrewdness are an inspiration for work with older students. Some titles of his sections are "One-paragraph compositions," "Subjects should be personal, definite, and brief," "Good and bad subjects illustrated," "Avoiding the trivial and the sensational," "The single-phase idea," "Starting the paragraph right." Mr. Sheridan has devoted his life to the reading and hearing of childish themes, to a study of what produced results; and all that he has to say is concrete. He insists on structure as a prime requisite for even the themes from the tiniest tots, and gives many examples of unity and emphasis within the limits of a few sentences. What do you say to this from the second grade?

> On the farm a man has a rabbit. I feed the rabbit with clover. I like to watch the rabbits nose when it eats.

We secondary teachers are likely to improve our work if, instead of looking up to college performances, we note the elementary ways of putting personal touches into brief paragraphs that come to a climax.

In *English Evidence* there is a long section on successful theme topics, contributed by thirteen different teachers. The *Pilot Book* for *Sentence and Theme* contains twenty-one pages of close-packed advice and illustrations for ninth-

grade assignments, and also a series of forty-five comments on the theme assignments of the textbook. By reading the following samples you can decide whether the book would be of any use to you:

Narratives of personal experience are best secured by setting a general topic which has some kind of example in the most uneventful young life. "A test of courage" or "an exciting adventure" will meet denial from many in the class, but "just in time" will correspond to something that happened in the lives of almost all. The event may have been quite trivial; "I couldn't make a whole theme out of it," thinks pupil. Teacher replies that merit in a theme is making something vivid: the arrival of a telegram just in time to save a life is no easier in itself—no more a guarantee of success—than the arrival of a policeman just in time to give me a shock and keep me from making a fool of myself on Halloween. A campaign against a troublesome rat or woodchuck is more likely than a Peninsular Campaign to produce interesting results. Nearly every child has lived through some little narrative that centers about "I forgot"—to mail a letter, to set the alarm, to notice the numbers, that I had another invitation. However slight in substance or lacking in tragedy, the forgetting was important and had climactic effect at the time; if that effect can be got on to paper, the theme is good. Most persons were (1) badly scared before they were sixteen or (2) had a close shave of some kind or (3) took a chance of some kind or (4) told a lie.

Any subject as large as "at the circus" is likely to cause that greatest fault in description—a catalog, another form of the "string of things." In proportion as a subject can be limited, description improves in ordinary school art. So "at the menagerie" is safer.

(*a*) Into the crowd and odors under the canvas.
(*b*) Noises.
(*c*) The ring of caged animals.
(*d*) The crowd that feeds and comments.
(*e*) The cage where I spent most time.

As in description the still life is to be avoided, so in exposition the still result is apt to be a corpse. "Furnishing my room" is likely to be a lifeless string of girlish things; "building a camp" will probably be a list of clanking boyish items. "The manufacture of paper" is, for the average student, an invitation to set up paragraphs like building-blocks. Even so active a title as "summer work" is sure to be a signal for an unorganized diary. These are not of necessity improper topics, but all of an able teacher's ingenuity is needed to inject life into them.

"Speaking to a friend" is the clue to all good handling of letter topics. "What would you say to him?" is the question that guides us all to the steps of an explanation. It is an ancient truism in rhetoric, yet hardly realized by any of us, that when we nerve ourselves to explain to the person who sits facing us, we find ourselves in a channel of thought that we should not have discovered if we had sat at a desk tapping our pen and wondering what words to put on paper. If in personal conference with some student you plead ignorance and say, "Well, now, tell me how it is," you are likely to have a good response, one that can be converted into a plan for a clear letter. Relate this experience to the class; describe how the written form was way off the track and getting nowhere, but how things went right and clearly as soon as Roger Mabie began to *talk* to you. "Talking letters" is a key to successful argument or exposition.

Here is a point of departure for innumerable journeys—both geographical and compositional. Herman Melville's *Typee*, which tells of the South Seas, is to be had in cheap form for school use. O'Brien's recent books are fascinating. Stevenson and Samoa at once suggest themselves. The typhoon in Apia harbor, the mysteries of Easter Island, the migration in small boats all the way around the Indian Ocean to Madagascar, the romances of Hawaii—such topics suggest how much might happen in a class that was interested to carry out a geography project.

What corner of the world will you select? Learn a few interesting details, plan an orderly whole for a theme, make the details contribute to some main impression.

For more advanced work there are thirty-two comments in *Workways*, discussing the textbook assignments of *Theme-Building;* also a reprint of a symposium of devices by Illinois teachers. Two sample paragraphs from the comments will show you what to expect.

If the topic [a picture of a volcano] is used, the greatest requisite in assigning a theme would be to demand that some one definite purpose be carried out. Readers of entrance examinations in English are continually wondering why candidates do not notice the topic set, why they write without defining to themselves any particular purpose. To tell a class to "write something about the volcano" is to invite them to injure their minds. "What one topic would you choose?" "Are you going to invent a romance or describe this particular mountain or explain what a volcano is?" "What one kind of effect are you aiming at?" "What is your plan, and where is your goal?" Such are the questions that lead to good structure.

The remarks about authors [that some of them did no revising of their best writing] do not indicate that class discussion should turn on what professionals have done, but show how unknown and interesting a subject we are approaching when we try to tell "how my mind makes a theme." . . . What these school authors have to tell us is of the highest interest, and they have never been solicited to tell what they know. . . . It is an alluring subject; to me it is exciting. I should guess that before long some teacher will gather a bundle of evidence from students, digest and compile it, contribute it to the *English Journal*, and startle the school world into noticing what the facts are. It is more than likely that by 1950 all our textbook method of prevision and outlines and topic sentences will be considered scholastic lumber, fit only for a bonfire. . . . I have found that boys like to teach me something about composition, instead of sitting forever receptive to my platitudes about how they ought to work. I believe that in pedagogic circles this attitude toward students is called "socializing." Perhaps "project" is the right term.

Some readers may feel depressed because I do not offer here a digest of topics and ways of assigning. Perhaps I ought to make a collection of such matter. Why I have not done so will appear from a clause in the second sentence of this section—*"Here is a recipe."* For the hope, though it is legitimate in one way, is largely a delusion. No one can tell you what are the best topics for you or the best ways of presenting them to a class. When you adopt another person's ideas, you are trying to import his personality into your classroom, where it will be a sort of wraith, distracting you from yourself. Theme assignments are peculiarly a personal matter. If you have certain leanings and likings, they will bear fruit in your class; if you try to transplant somebody else's peculiarities, you will be artificial. Themes are nothing if not realities. The only use of other people's ideas is to set your own mind at work in its own bent.

B. The Structure of Themes

1. Paragraphs. A long chapter could not contain the evidence for the different views now current about the paragraph, and probably the array of opinions would not much edify you. I will summarize the conclusions I have reached after all my efforts to find out what a paragraph ought to be in school. No idea that follows is peculiar to me, but every one is corroborated by other practical workers and academic critics.

(*a*) The paragraphs of literature have been made without knowledge of our school formulas. It is likely that most of them have not been planned in advance,* but have been

*It is likely, for example, that Santayana, in *The Life of Reason*, is describing a process common to authors when he speaks thus about his own mode of composing: "My hand, guided by I know not what machinery, is at this moment adding syllable to syllable upon this paper, to the general fulfilment, perhaps, of my felt intent, yet giving that intent an articulation wholly unforeseen, and often disappointing. The thoughts to be expressed simmer half-consciously in my brain. I feel their burden and tendency without seeing their form."

made by writers who were intent on moving ahead coherently through a whole chapter. It would appear that they make a paragraph when they find that they are going to swing to a somewhat different phase of the subject. There is evidence that many authors have made new paragraphs for no better reason than that "this paragraph is long enough." Paragraph divisions are often debatable. If you should take a chapter of De Quincey, type it solid, and ask ten modern journalistic writers to paragraph it, you would have ten different sets of paragraphs—and each could be justified. This fact about the paragraphs of literature does not prove anything about the best mode of teaching in school, but a knowledge of it will prevent us from entangling ourselves with wrong theory.

(*b*) Some very successful teachers have bent most of their energies to developing the one-paragraph theme. Such compositions are not like the divisions that authors make in connected discourse. They are complete in themselves; and because they confine a student to one definite, limited effort, they may be admirable exercises in structure. But any ordinary one-paragraph theme could properly be divided into two, or even three, paragraphs, just as the long paragraphs of novels will bear splitting up into rational smaller paragraphs. All is a matter of proportion. There is seldom a possibility, except in a closely reasoned passage, of saying, "This much matter must be considered one paragraph."

(*c*) There is little evidence that authors have ever worked by the method of a topic sentence. It is true that each one of their well-made paragraphs has a topic, which can be expressed in a sentence; and it is true—it must in the nature of things be true—that some sentence can usually be found in the paragraph which states the topic. But sometimes every sentence could be called a topic sentence, and sometimes it is hard to select any sentence that deserves the name.

Authors do not build around a topic sentence; they keep moving forward coherently; any topic sentence is only an incident of the march of their thought.

(*d*) The fact about authors' topic sentences does not prove anything about the best ways of going to work in school. I have often tried the method of topic sentences and can see its merits. But it never lured me on; it always showed disadvantages. After an exercise in it I found that boys who were most lacking in skill would fall into this mode of composing: "Now I will set down at the beginning a topic sentence; then my duty is done; then I can write ahead for a while; then I can start off again with another topic sentence."

So I always find myself driven back to the author's way of composing: Keep moving straight ahead, so that a reader passes easily from sentence to sentence; when a new phase appears, move coherently to a new block of writing. The "phase" is a new time or new character or new angle or new place or a contrast—or what not. I teach that a paragraph is part of a continuous whole. Whether a paragraph division ought to be made at a given point is often a pure question of taste; I am often unable to prove unmistakably to a boy that there should or should not be a new paragraph at a certain place. Hence the whole mechanism of "topic sentence" would fail to apply to the most vital part of the teaching—the coherent advance.

(*e*) It is easy to guess, then, that I have no exercises in manufacturing paragraphs as separate entities. For me they are always divisions of a composition. Sometimes a composition need not be divided, and then we have a one-paragraph theme. I make the same insistence on a prompt beginning and orderly sequence to a climax that is made by teachers of the one-paragraph theme, but I teach that this theme usually ought to be divided.

(*f*) I have never manufactured a paragraph by any method of "contrast" or of "assembling particulars" or any other of the dozen known systems. Naturally, then, I do not know how to tell students about these methods. I have never seen evidence that students ought to have that sort of discipline.

(*g*) The paragraph has become for me one of the large units of a theme which show the general plan of the whole. If the topic of each paragraph is named, and if these titles are set down in a list, the result is an outline of the theme. Thus paragraphs and outlines have become for me inseparable matters.

2. "Introductions." The Literature Tradition, founded on the processes of scholarship, ordained that every essay should consist of three parts: introduction, body, conclusion. The dictum still persists in theoretical minds, but has been discarded as a pest by some trainers of teachers. An introduction to a school theme is almost sure to be a waste of time, because the theme is so short and the matter so obvious that a writer should begin without preliminary formalities. An introduction is almost sure to be tiresome and in bad taste; it is likely to be an incoherent gob of matter stuck in front of the theme proper. The dullest students are likely to be most fond of it. Proscribe it. An amusing proof of how unfit an "introduction" is for the modern world was once given me by a man who had been a writer of advertisements. He told me that when he was an apprentice his chief would regularly draw a line below the opening sentences, which had been written as an introduction, and say, "Here is the real beginning."

3. "Conclusion" vs. climax. There should be only one part of a theme—the body. This should begin promptly, even abruptly, if a reader is to receive a good first impression. It must close with a snap. Any "conclusion" is a kind of

wandering on beyond the real end. I have found that the word "snapper" appeals to boys as a name for the satisfactory, quick, decided end of a theme. They like to "make it snappy." It is nothing less than astonishing to see how inartistic boys can catch the trick of climax and thus improve themes by an easy process that tickles their fancies. Often a good theme leaves a bad taste because of a flat conclusion; and a hit-or-miss composition, with little merit, may be a pleasant memory if it is well "snapped." No one discovery in my efforts for better structure has produced so much effect as can be had by constant insistence on climax, on "those very last words." Somehow the effect on students seems to be that, from the beginning of a theme, their minds are thinking of "some last words," and thus they are insensibly led to a straighter, more coherent course, to better proportion, to emphasis.

4. Outlines. This is a peculiar subject. My own experience with it seems so illogical that I have been distrustful of it, fearing that a peculiarity of my own way of composing has influenced me wrongly in advising students. I can seldom draw up a plan in advance. If I foresee in a general way what I wish to do, if I plunge in and warm to the work, then my mind develops the subject much better than when it was coldly trying to "previse" what to say. So I used to be dubious about recommending outlines. One year it occurred to me to find out how boys made outlines—yes, actually I had the wit, after fifteen years of theorizing, to examine a few facts. It appeared that not one of the best writers in a class of fifty made an outline in advance, and that very few of the others did. The rascals had obediently furnished me an outline for each theme, but had made it up *after writing!* The first time I told a class of teachers about this experiment, I saw that a

number of them were smiling and nodding to indicate that I was telling them no news. Here is an indication that we do not know much about the value of outlines. I believe they are valuable. If a student is required to submit an outline for each theme, he is conscious as he writes that he must be able to demonstrate an orderly structure when he has finished. This responsibility guides him. The question of *when* he makes the outline is none of my concern if he produces the structure. His mind probably works better than anybody's guess as to how it ought to work.

I can only gape at an outline of a paragraph. It seems to me like a map of a dooryard, for the space is so small and the items so few. On the other hand, the charting of all the items in all the sentences would be a most difficult psychological analysis, which would result in more words than the paragraph contains. The fact seems to be that an intelligent student can make a paragraph and that he cannot make it any better if he is compelled to chart his operations. So I have never required an outline which showed subdivisions of the paragraphs. (I am speaking of outlines here, not of analysis to see whether paragraphs are unified and coherent; I do a great deal of such dissecting of paragraphs.)

A paragraph is for me, therefore, an indivisible unit of composition. In the case of an ordinary theme less than five hundred words long (or even much longer) the outline is no more than a list of the topics of the paragraphs. For a long theme it may be desirable to show that the paragraphs are grouped in two or three main divisions. If a theme, for example, has eight paragraphs, it might be schematized in the manner outlined on the following page, the arabic numbers representing the topics of the paragraph:

I.
  1.
  2.
  3.
II.
  4.
  5.
  6.
III.
  7.
  8.

My own worst failure in teaching the use of outlines has been that I have not gone far enough in suggesting to the class, or working out with them, an outline that might be used for the topic assigned. I used to be too much afraid of doing the work for the students, of not encouraging originality of treatment; and I think most American teachers have felt the same way. But I am now convinced that a suggested outline gives the poor student valuable aid and does the inventive student no harm. I present such an outline to the class with a sort of apology: "This particular plan is not recommended; you ought to do better; but at least it may keep some of you from wandering."

C. The Four "Types" of Composition

Of late years there has been a revulsion against the "types of discourse"—narration, description, exposition, and argument. The fun that has been made of these scholastic classifications is entirely justified, because they do not name the kinds of effort that we have to make in the composition of real life. We have to tell a story as an aid in argument or to give a description for the purpose of explaining. But there is a use in the four types and in

assigning themes of those sorts. By so doing we can show students how to be conscious of the purpose they have in mind. "Are you trying to explain something, or do you want to amuse me with a story, or do you want to persuade me?" we ask. A student who is confined to one sort of effort at a time is more likely to show unity of purpose and to attain good structure. We are not setting a task in producing a certain type of discourse, but are limiting and defining the task. Make all the fun you want of the types, and let the class share in the fun; but secure the definite purpose in every theme.

The following statements about the four types are opinions generally held today:

1. It is needless to classify the kinds of narration, but the purposes should be clear. Are you retelling somebody else's story? Are you inventing a climax for an actual happening? Are you relating a series of events as they happened? Are you inventing a piece of fiction—that is, a plot which tells about a change of fortune? The narrative that merely rehearses a string of happenings is such an artless and purposeless sort of composition that it may be positively harmful. Some contrivance, real composing, is essential.

2. The ordinary "description" that we used to rely on is now seen to be deadly because it is worse than a string of happenings; it is a string of things. Assembling a lot of objects to fill out a still-life picture is not likely to result in either interest for the reader or training for the writer. But a lively scene, a focusing upon the activity of some one minute, can be excellent training in which there is opportunity for spirited work. The secret of success is in these formulas: "Show me how it was during just those few seconds. Focus everything within that one minute. Have people or animals in it. Have action."

3. Exposition should not be a string of "first assemble materials, then make this motion, then this second motion, then this third motion." That is a mere chronicle of steps taken. Good comes from trying to explain some process that a reader does not understand—for example: How does a butterfly eat? What is the secret of a safety match? What is cement? Topics are of endless variety. Exposition is the most real of the types, for it is the process that we most constantly wish we could use well—whether for advertising or selling or giving information or preparing the way to persuade people.

4. Argument is the most difficult kind of composition. Lively oral debates may be staged effectively in seventh-grade classes, and a tenth-grade class may respond with interest to a question that is causing discussion in a school. But the resulting compositions will be largely assertions of opinion and not good exercise in structure unless there is instruction in definite ways of going to work. A class can learn: not to assert brusquely, to begin by admitting the justice of the other side, to show politely why we believe as we do, to depend on the one big reason rather than on "and now my third point is." To build an argument around one reason is the way of producing better structure—that is a minor advantage. The major advantage is that it is very much more persuasive. If I tell you my eleven reasons, you are not moved; but if I disclose my one big, compelling reason, you are affected.

D. The Artistic Motivation

Two assumptions are made by nearly all teachers and texts when they exhort for better style. The first is that artists in words have begun their careers by "aping the masters." I suppose that every high-school graduate has

heard of how Stevenson trained himself by being a sedulous ape and of how Franklin cultivated his style by trying to reproduce the *Spectator Papers*. Have you ever seen any other case cited in a rhetoric? Have you heard of other cases? The general truth about literary artists has been the opposite. Most of them have dreaded to be influenced by other authors' peculiarities and would on no account do exercises in imitating. They have felt that Maurice de Guérin rightly advised his sister: "Form for yourself a style of your own, which shall be your real expression. Study the French language . . . . without ever adopting the manner of any master." What some critics think of the Stevenson method may be gaged by the opinion of Havelock Ellis in *The Dance of Life:* "By a dutiful study of what other people have said . . . . a writer can become at last, like Stevenson, the idol of the crowd. But the great writer can learn only out of himself. . . . 'Style must be founded upon models'; it is the rule set up by the pedant who knows nothing of what style means. For the style that is founded on a model is the negation of style."

The matter is ordinarily unimportant in school, a high refinement that need not concern us. We may be glad if any student is ambitious enough to try to imitate a style. But a teacher may vitiate his efforts if he takes for granted, as a basic axiom, a principle that most authors have despised.

The second assumption is that makers of literature have written a first draft rapidly and have then corrected it with minute attention to details. The writing of Gray's "Elegy" is the stock example, and there is a wealth of other proof that some authors have written with fury and corrected with phlegm. But there is copious proof that Thackeray and Dickens and Scott did not follow any such method. George Eliot's most powerful scenes were written rapidly and never revised. On the other hand we know

of third-rate novelists who dictate with fury and then correct with laborious care. We could dismiss the question by stating the two sides of it and could remark that the examples of professionals prove nothing for school. But the question has another aspect that is important for the literal-minded amateur in an ordinary school—to wit: modern conditions of life require an ability to compose on the first draft. In Civil Service examinations, for example, and in the requirements of the New York Board of Regents, candidates are not expected to write with fury. The business man cannot correct with phlegm. All the evidence I know shows that a school ought to train students to plan mentally, to write carefully a first draft, and to work toward dispensing with a second draft.

E. Handling Themes

Schools are as temperamental as teachers. The mental adjustment which works smoothly for you in one school may grind in the next one. If I can trust reports, the variation of school temperament is greater for oral themes than for written. I once heard a knot of teachers talking about "encouraging these shy and timid pupils." One of them commented thus: "Encourage them! Why, in my school most of them want to prattle. They love to have the floor. They're too confident and fluent." This seemed to be corroborated by several of the others, one of whom added, "But some teachers keep a strict, formal atmosphere in the classroom. I suppose their pupils are shy." Another gave opposite testimony: "In Blankville those children dread to speak. I hardly dare to criticize." There seem to be as many adjustments to oral themes as there are combinations of teachers and classes. In one room there is said to be lively and intelligent criticism from

pupils; in another there is said to be no criticism worth while. One teacher learns to make some of the corrections while a theme is being delivered; others (probably a big majority) refrain almost entirely from criticism until the recitation is finished. Some can succeed with ridicule; others are always gently encouraging. Some learn to socialize almost completely; others lift their eyebrows at the mention of socializing.

In oral composition, therefore, your personality will have to find its own way. Even if you should be advised by someone whose temperament is a doublet of yours, distrust him; for his experience may have been with a class whose tone and mettle were different from the group that you are to teach. I doubt whether in this age of experiment with oral themes anyone in the country is wise enough to give advice that you may rely upon without testing it.

Almost as strong a reason can be given for saying nothing in this chapter about the handling of written themes. There are classes that dread writing and classes that almost enjoy it. There are teachers who secure good results with sarcasm and teachers who think sarcasm sinful. Some good teachers believe that their best device is preserving themes, and some never have them kept; some (probably most) are very neat in their marking, while others scrawl and slash with a blunt colored pencil; some grade for "effectiveness," some for "making an effort"; some will "not accept" a careless theme, whereas others would on no account miss the chance to accept and enter a zero mark for a careless theme. Modes of criticism vary as much as noses, and the kinds of correcting that teachers require vary from nothing to complete rewriting.

With that I should prefer to dismiss the subject. But certain comments on the more mechanical matters are wanted by most novices. What follows will not do much

harm if you realize that it is one person's way of doing a job which is never twice the same. If we were talking together, I should make you put up your hand and swear that, if I proceed, you will accept nothing without trial.

This first paragraph of comment, however, is very likely to be right for any teacher in any school, because it refers to universal conditions and states what every experienced teacher finally learns, what no one of them believed until after many years of nerve-wasting. You will not believe it at all. You will think I talk like a martinet who cannot be comfortable if there is a speck on a sergeant's puttee. The only good you will derive from this paragraph is that you may learn the truth in five years instead of waiting, as most of us did, for ten. The truth is: no class will follow your instructions for form of manuscript unless you are painfully explicit and repetitious, unless you penalize for not following instructions, unless you know in your heart of hearts that it is good for them to follow. I personally dislike regularity and should be happier without any requirements for manuscript form. The years have taught me a necessity at which you are this moment turning up your nose.

Also you think I show a mean disposition when I say "penalize"—and that is another matter that you should investigate in your handling of themes. Penalizing, you may not realize, is a matter of personality. In some happy families there is none; in some fearfully unhappy families there is none. Nobody can tell what you ought to do in your class, but anyone can show you two phases of penalizing that are likely to be significant. In the first place, it is possible to smile and be friendly while you penalize; good animal-trainers never lose their tempers; some of them penalize systematically; most of them are liked by the animals; boys are more like animals than they are like a

woman. In the second place, there is the story of the little girl who was naughty. On a rainy day indoors her temper had gone from bad to worse, while mother reasoned and expostulated and besought and finally prayed. Bad little girl grew badder. At length she screamed out, "I won't!" Then the Quaker grandmother, who had been silent, spoke a short complex sentence: "If thee says that again, I shall punish thee." Bad little girl screamed the defiance again; grandmother kept silent; grandmother kept her word, kept it fully, with a heavy slipper. Long years afterwards, when the girl was a mother and telling the episode in a magazine article, she gave this description of what penalizing did for her: "All my tempest of badness ceased the moment the slipper was applied; I wept with unutterable happiness of relief, and shortly I sank to sweet sleep." When you are handling themes, it may be better—but decide for yourself —to spank 'em.

The whole process of assigning, reading, criticizing, and correcting themes is almost as personal as managing a home. People and homes differ—that's all. And you know that some of the published advice about bringing up children is written by childless people. Probably all the advice that sounds prettiest to maidens and bachelors was so written. Do you suppose it is possible that the advice you like best about handling themes was written by——— But let us quit all generalities and proceed to concrete particulars.

Take plenty of time when you assign the first theme to give exact instructions as to form. Make everything explicit, say it twice, leave nothing to be taken for granted. There is to be a margin at the left one inch wide, and there is to be no margin at the right. There is to be a title set well up above the first line, each word of which (except articles, conjunctions, and prepositions) is to be capitalized. Announce the required length as "not less than so many

words"; for if you say "pages," you will have to accept half-measure from some. At the top of the first page there shall be "just one brief title for each paragraph," numbered to correspond to the paragraphs. Pages are to be numbered, are to be arranged in the right order, are to be folded in one way; the name is to appear on the side you specify.

Advice about grading themes has been given previously. Here I will only add a bit of counsel which I think must be nearly always true. Avoid, so far as possible, all fussing with phrasing and uses of words that are somewhat clumsy, but that are hard to analyze definitely and that have not been dwelt on in class, and for which students are not responsible. I am not asserting that such awkwardnesses are less important than mechanical errors, though I think a strong argument could be made for that opinion. The counsel is based on an entirely different consideration—the fact, namely, that unless you are experienced and have the entire confidence of the class, you will not carry conviction to the boys and girls, but will appear to them as a dabbler in mystical niceties. First convince the class that you are finding fault only with their *carelessness;* then you may gradually learn ways of being more "constructive" in your criticisms.

You will save time and do better work if you are on the lookout for errors that are typical, everlastingly recurrent. If you take a whole minute in recitation to comment on a peculiar blunder which occurs in only one theme, you may be wasting twenty-nine times one minute for all the rest of the class. As I read a sheaf of themes, I jot down memoranda of the common kinds of blunders. If in class next day I can read off at one breath the six names of the criminals who made sentence-errors, I give them a sense of being singled out and posted in a list of defectives. I want statistics: how many failed to leave a margin? who failed to spell *all right?* who began with an aimless introduction?

As a reinforcement of the points in the last two paragraphs I quote a few sentences from an article, "How to Read Pupils' Written Themes," which may, before its influence ceases, save a hundred thousand hours of time for theme-readers. It is by Professor Charles S. Pendleton, in the *Peabody Journal of Education* for March, 1924.

> Speed in reading themes is a habit; it can be developed. . . One can race through a theme and get most of it. . . . There is a tradition, venerable and hoary, about red-inking themes, in the text and in the margin, with specific symbols indicating the particular types of errors found. In the light of modern educational experience, this procedure is probably indefensible. . . . When a teacher specifically points out every fault in a writing, with a label characterizing it, he does what the pupil himself should do and could be taught to do. . . . The only important thing in theme-reading is to learn, and to bring to the writer's attention, specific *habits* which are manifest. If an error occurs only once, it is negligible. . . . Teachers waste much time correcting accidents.

Much more impotant than a record of typical errors is a record of merits. I like to have a bunch of four themes that show "a real snap at the end"; a bunch of five in which I have marked entertaining passages to read aloud; a couple that aroused my curiosity near the beginning. Any praise for excellence is doubly effective if it goes to a student who has no reputation for skill; it gives him joy and hope; it rouses a good emulation in others.

It is often well to plan a harangue about themes—for example: first to give a blowing-up about carelessness with mechanics, next to give praise for skill and interest, then to close with an attack on poor sentences and incoherence between paragraphs. Thus you attack them, cheer them, and leave them with the feeling that much remains to do.

A favorite subject for my philippics is the repetition of words. It passes all belief how a student never hears his own sentences until you read them before the class; how month after month he will persist in saying "Then we came to a cliff; at the foot of this cliff"; how he cannot give up that repeated noun; how after you have three times trailed your red pencil across one of his pages to show nine *boats* or ten *rooms* or eleven *Indians* he will submit you a page with seven *schools* on it. If you keep at him and keep at him, you are revising his whole mentality, making him attain to all the maturity he will ever be capable of. Would you have variety in sentences? Don't present any theory of monotony; insist that all subjects must not come first; read the beginnings of ten babyishly similar sentences in Tom Jones's theme. Then plan to follow Tom up, to hound him, to get finally a page on which four subjects are not first. Read a string of consecutive simple sentences from Marian Chevalier's story, coming to the end of each with a thud, showing what they sound like. Read five consecutive compound sentences from Bob's description, dwelling clankingly on that infernal *and,* until the class hears what monotony is. Rehearse and rehearse and rehearse some decent complex sentences *beginning* with a dependent clause and closing strongly. Hold up for laughter that aimless habit of saying "Nothing at all was happening, *when suddenly* something portentous happened." Inquire and inquire and inquire whether they are not willing to *begin* with a *while* or a *just as.* Those are the operations that prevail upon dull minds to imitate something approaching a mature and varied style.

Probably the most valuable maneuver in the handling of themes is to make a point of giving praise when you fall in talk with a student outside of class. If you make a list of five names, with memoranda of the five ways in which you were pleased, and if you casually remark in the corridor,

"I read to Miss Thayer what you wrote about the conceited sparrow," you may in a few seconds kindle a spark that will be ever-during and gladdening in a mind which has not suspected it could be entertaining.

The appeal to "being entertaining" will be flimsy make-believe if you have in mind only some theory about literary knack. The bit of entertainment that Bob furnished when he told how a sparrow acted is an indication that he has risen to a new plane in getting on with the world. I have illustrated that rather extreme statement by reading to a class a letter from a mountaineer who never had had any training in composition. It was as dead as if it had emanated from a tomb, utterly unlike the shrewd and entertaining man who wrote it. He was alive, but he was dead on paper. Bob is learning to live on paper. Most boys can do likewise—*if their themes are handled right.* If you handle them by an appeal to R. L. Stevenson, you may never teach realities of composition.

Here I go, sentimentalizing when I have promised mechanics. I apologize. But I have by my carelessness shown you a good trick. Didn't you like the sentiment? Then you may judge how your principal and all the parents like it. Dwell upon it when you talk with them. But as you gain experience and have to take your turn in advising novices, never talk sentiment. Whenever you do so, you rouse a hope that personality can be transplanted into their work. Tell them only of the mechanical elements that are true of all people in all work—as I shall do for the rest of this chapter.

One of the best ways to save eyesight and time and temper is to insist that syllables be joined and words be spaced wide apart. Laboratory experiment has shown that nothing else so retards a reader as carelessness with spacing.

I very seldom require rewriting of themes, but always have them corrected by the following time-saving plan: the pupil first goes through his theme, numbering every mark I have made; then on a separate sheet, numbering to correspond, he writes his words and sentences as they ought to be; he folds this in the theme and at the next recitation hands in these corrections. A pupil who is careful has little work to do; one who is careless would rather rewrite entire.

The description of corrections applies to themes written on folded paper. If you prefer permanent theme-books, as many wise teachers do, you can have corrections written on the page immediately following a theme. Thus they will be a permanent record of the amount of carelessness and of increase or decrease during a semester. I have no doubt that the preserving of themes and corrections is good practice, for many experienced teachers cannot speak calmly of the way in which I have allowed themes to become private property. I used to have my set of pigeon-holes labeled with the names of the students, and kept themes for reference. But in my school the file seemed not to amount to much. I can guess that the fault was in me, not in the system. Some schools find that the record of a complete set of themes has a marked influence in cultivating a knowledge of what responsibility is.

From the testimony of boys of all sorts I should judge that half the teachers in the United States do not give much heed to the correction of themes. All of these boys have written themes—oh, yes; most of them suppose that their themes have been read; probably three-fourths have had themes returned all marked up by teachers; but only a third of them comprehend me when I ask, "How did you correct them?" Now I should as soon think of watering flowers with kerosene as of placing on a theme red marks that were not to result in some work by the writer. My only

purpose in marking errors is to indicate what labor must be performed. I am more severe about correcting than about the making of a theme.

It is often possible to write on themes effective notes which point the way to higher endeavor, more finesse, more individuality. Also it is possible to alienate the minds of students by pitching such notes in too literary a key. In all your manipulating of "constructive" criticism bear in mind the witty journalist who tells how his college instructor used to say, "The author of Genesis would have managed this better."

The following allegory will illustrate how the journalist felt when he read the comment on his freshman theme: Once upon a time an apostle of Apollo, carrying his violin, met a Wyoming sheep-herder who was buying provisions in a grocery store. "Let me play you this charming thing," said the apostle, "so that when you are back on the range you may try it *upon your shepherd's pipe.*"

CHAPTER XV

READING

In 1916 I wrote for the first edition of *What Is English?* a chapter on "Reading," which I have never reread since it was between covers. In those eight years English has changed somewhat, and I have changed much. What revision, I wonder as I look at the pages, will be necessary? While I read, I smile. I should write differently about the subject now. But I decide to let the chapter stand exactly as it was written, not altering the dates or certain references that are now obsolescent. As you read it, carry out this project: try to decide why I smiled.

Why do people read? If that seems too universal to admit of an answer, narrow it down to a particular book and a particular person. Upon the reply depends your whole conception of what it means "to teach literature." If the answer seems obvious, close this book and ponder an hour before you open it again. Any solution offered to you ready-made is worthless, but your own earnest thoughts may be as a light to your feet.

Do you happen to recall Whittier's poem, "The Demon of the Study"? When "she" read a tale of woe, there were tears in her eye; and a merry song would make her voice as glad as an April bird's. But the demon read hour after hour in the selfsame tone. He was a "reading fiend." Whittier did not know whence he came. We know. He comes from that *sense of duty* about literature, that feeling that we ought to read. All specializers in English have read as a business and have felt that they ought "to supply their

most serious deficiencies." It has seldom been an irksome duty. "The stout old man with the greasy hat" has not taken the joy out of the "Ode to the West Wind"; he has not really obsessed us; many of us have been quite unconscious of his presence. Whittier had more sensitive perceptions. He felt the hidden motive—that Apollo's wares are precious and that we must busily gather heaps of them—which impelled him to read and read and read; and he personified the impulse. All things that bore the government stamp of the kingdom of the muses were objects of the poet's desire. "She" very likely had not the least use for *The Rape of the Lock* or *The Tatler*. Probably there were weeks when she did not read a page, and never felt one covetous pang for the literary treasure she might have piled up in those days. Whittier credits her with being the right kind of reader.

Should there be any such thing as an "ought" when it comes to reading? If a person finds no pleasure in *The Lady of the Lake,* ought he to train himself into a condition in which the poem is "not so bad after all"? Should we as teachers feel that pupils ought to like *Two Years before the Mast,* and that it is sad if they prefer *Potash and Perlmutter* to *Sesame and Lilies?* Or should we say that reading is a pleasure, a luxury; that when we make any attempt to alter and educate tastes we are violating the very spirit that makes literature valuable? Even if we seem to succeed in luring the barbarians from the *Cosmopolitan* to Thackeray, have we really benefited them? Have we not merely adorned the surface? Is it not a process of painting the leopard's spots? To put it concretely: if "she" had not cared for poetry and if Whittier had put her into his English class, would the results have been worth while?

I should never have known how vehement the usual affirmative is if I had not once happened to attend a certain

"round table." The discussion languished. The experienced teachers were hopeful of nothing; the novices feared to ask questions. After an embarrassing period of silence the hour was saved by a girl's self-sacrifice. She propounded: "Why is it that pupils don't like to read the classics?" There was a tempest. Every one of the fifty-eight teachers was ready to rise and speak her thoughts. For the life of me I could not guess why. The query seemed to me as natural and as useless as if in a Bible class someone should ask, "Why is it that people don't like to be good?" I have seen a class enjoy *The Vicar of Wakefield*, but not in the sense in which they "like" the *Saturday Evening Post.*

I was soon enlightened. The novice and I were alone in a dark pit, and torch-bearers came from every side. It appeared that pupils *did* like the classics. One lady asserted that she could not recall a single instance in her career of the failure of a class to like a piece of literature. No others could go as far as that, yet all thought the dislike was exceptional. Imagine such a question in such a company! Try to imagine my Whittier question in such an environment. The base and cowardly cold-heartedness of it would have filled the room with tumultuous pity. Worth while to try? Why, it was tragic that anyone should fail. I caught no least indication that the "worth while" question would have been regarded as a sane one.

Perhaps it is not. It may be like asking, "Is it worth while to try to save human souls?" Since it is generally conceded that every person has a soul and that there is a way to save it, a minister who answered "no" would seem to deny his calling. Most teachers invest their profession with this sacred character. A boy who has been taught to enjoy Shakespeare has been saved.

Probably you are already imbued with this notion. You will find it breathing all about you from the moment you

enter on your labors, from every colleague and every "suggestions for teachers." If you meet with discouragements, remember that there is a teacher in the world who does not know that he ever induced one human being to like a piece of literature. This confession may comfort and sustain you, because it is likely that hundreds of teachers are no better off.

Why do people read? Excluding all of us who are haunted by the fiend and all who read so as to be able to say they have read (notice I shift to "they"), why do people curl up with a book? Because they are after pleasure, wish entertainment. No author wants his work perused on any other terms. No one who reads for any other reason is honoring the writer. If a friend of yours never looks at a novel that is more than three years old, you may feel sorry for him because such a great lot of pleasure is denied him. Do you try to convert him? Do you feel that he ought to be saved esthetically?

That is where the whole world divides into two classes, the missionaries and the others. If your instinct is, having the light, to pass it on, your life will be an effort to convert pupils to the beauties of literature.

It is a noble instinct. The world needs more of your kind. But there is a chance that you will be more effective in proportion as you sympathize with the other fellow. How about being missionaried? Are you yourself most apt to be converted by the person whose manner announces, "I propose to influence your soul"? As for me, my soul retires into a corner at the first intimation of such a design. I resent any effort to lure and proselyte my spirit, and I have noticed that young people are singularly like their elders in the matter of mental autonomy. If I see a friend getting five dollars' worth of pleasure out of *Siegfried* or a league game, I may learn to covet his source of happiness, may

catch the contagion; but not because of any effort he makes to persuade me. People who whole-heartedly enjoy their children or their tobacco never seem concerned to convert bachelors or non-smokers. Genuine delight never worries about influencing other people; yet it is making converts all the time. *The English Leaflet 13* contains a whole gospel of "inspiring" in one sentence: "I remember a very poor teacher of literature who lived in an atmosphere so sincere, so generous, so humanly sympathetic that her pupils left her enriched and strengthened for actual living." Somehow I suspect that this woman never coached herself to inculcate a love. It is likely that she simply tried to be honest and thorough in her daily business.

How responsive have you been to those intellectual missionaries who have tried to kindle in you some appreciation of their gospels of physics or astronomy? Has your soul been roused to apprehend the culture offered by modern science, or do you merely tolerate it in a benignant way? Have you thoroughly realized that there is a mental exhilaration in radium and Peruvian ruins and wireless and the fight against cancer beside which *Il Penseroso* is feeble? Three years ago a boy who was not very keen for Milton's minor poems introduced me to a science book which had, if rightly read, more stimulus for the imagination than most of us can get from *Paradise Lost.* Literature is not the only treasure on that strand where Newton and Browning have to be met together if they are rightly met. Goethe, whose emotions could be so profoundly stirred by *The Vicar of Wakefield*, occupied his soul with the theory of light. May a teacher of literature not be in danger of assuming that the right kind of spirit is absorbed too exclusively in the ode "Intimations of Immortality" and of forgetting that the literature string is not the strongest in the human harp?

But granting the full worth of this desire to enlighten, it must be ever borne in mind that no art is so difficult as converting. Billy Sunday has a gift that converts thousands; Bunyan and King David could hardly save themselves. One professor has the knack of turning thousands of young men into the paths of good reading; another can only feel that stony-ground agriculture will not pay in the long run. Imprudent and unsympathetic zeal may do incalculable harm. The instant you step out of your own personality in an attempt "to inspire a love of good reading" you wrong yourself and the class. You may get a galvanic result—some reaction that is jerkily strong—but you will set up no steady current. You may plant seed, may add fertilizer; but God alone can give the increase. Thank Him for it if you find He has given you the gift. Don't be melancholy if you find yourself unendowed. English literature has propagating powers of its own. They tell me that nowadays great reliance is put in medical missionaries, men who do not directly aim at soul-saving, but who lay splendid foundations. If we unfortunate teachers, of lesser talents, will minister to the mere information of the barbarians, we can feel that we accomplish something.

To be genuine, to be frank, never to allow a taint of hypocrisy to enter into what we say, will insure against evil effects and never detract from good work. Few persons can be perfectly frank with themselves in this matter, much less with others. In this very chapter, for example, after all my revising, all abandoning of hedging statements, there is an irreducible element of pretense and humbug. One dreads to appear a cold, denying spirit; would like to echo what is so conventionally warm and humane; is forever tempted to deceive himself by imputing to himself motives which it is generally supposed he ought to have. I speak of this because, knowing that I am not an exceptional being, I must

suppose that others in their publicly expressed opinions and advice have had a little of my weakness. And I think it may put heart into some first-year worker if I give him this hope that he is not such a miserable failure after all. I am sure that in my own first years such a word would not have lessened my earnestness, and would have been a real source of cheerfulness. You can do better when you are cheerful.

You have noticed that there are persons to whom babies will always go and persons who are the life of a party. The most crafty scheming will not lure the little ones, nor the most eager determination add to a party's merriment. But patient study of bait and pools may enable you to get a little nearer to the record of that fellow who always has the biggest catch of fish. Think of those cases when you sit before a class.

The *English Journal* reported three years ago some very interesting data that were collected in Illinois and elsewhere. "What do pupils enjoy?"* was answered from hundreds of reports of class votes on the books read in school. The questionnaire was prompted by the feeling that we ought to prescribe what pupils like, or at least that we ought not to prescribe what they very generally dislike. It has been contended that this is false pedagogy; that making things easy is a way of making intellects flabby. Perfectly true of the ordinary subjects, whose merit is that they are hard. But *Lycidas* was not written to offer difficulties; Johnson disliked it because it was easy. All literature was designed to give pleasure. If it is made an instrument of mental drill, it is —offer what other defense you may—being perverted from its function. That is the kernel of the whole discussion. May it not be abnormal and wrong to try to teach a love of literature?

*An interesting recent study of this subject is F. B. Knight's *Textbook Selection*. Two useful pamphlets, containing classified lists of tested books, are described in the next chapter.

Examine yourself, for doing that honestly is the only way to find out about the other fellow. What author were you ever "taught" to love? The man who could teach me to love *Sesame and Lilies* doesn't live. What percentage of teachers could persuade you to love *The Idler* or *The Alchemist* or *The Task?* Suppose that you are a great admirer of *Night Thoughts*, what proportion of a hundred teachers sitting at your feet could you convert to your admiration? Ninety-nine would like the *Dedication* of *Barrack-room Ballads*, but that would be due—to you? Suppose that Mrs. Tingley took the chair and by her personal magnetism inspired ten to love theosophy; should you think well of the converts or long to emulate the converter? If you are in a literature class, which kind of force do you wish operant upon yourself, that of Mrs. Tingley or that of the *Dedication?*

The comparison ought not to be pushed. It is unfair and scornful. Moreover it may be objected that we are quibbling about a definition; that skill in giving literature its opportunity to charm may be all that is meant by "inculcating a love." Yet we surely are discussing something immensely more important than a definition. We are speaking of a stimulus, often a strong one, that some teachers give. We see it in other subjects. One teacher has inspired many pupils with a devotion to algebra; doubtless another has imparted an interest in Latin; certainly the right teaching of physics or geography often rouses enthusiasm. The work of ministers is more than an analogy: some of them are able to inspire a love of religion.

Here is the point, then, where I am expected to smash comparisons with a logical battering-ram. I have not the mental strength. It appears to me that we are all alike; that the highest function of all teachers, of all decent citizens in every profession, is to inspire somebody with a love of something. I am writing this chapter just because I

cannot see why English teachers should think themselves specially commissioned to shed sweetness and light on an otherwise dark and tasteless curriculum. We do so distinguish ourselves. College catalogs speak of "developing a taste for good literature" when they describe English courses, whereas announcements of music or history or art speak only of such unspiritual matters as knowledge or proficiency. The file of *Leaflets* is pied with such gorgeous claims for good English teaching as: "spiritual enlarging and kindling," "insight into character," "inculcation of a love of books," "affection that springs from delight." Did you ever see in discussions of other branches any parallel to these ecstasies?

May we not properly apply a little skepticism to a creed containing these extraordinary articles, and scrutinize the evidence? Granted that this power of inspiring exists, what percentage of high-school teachers have it? Half of them? Make a list of those you know, putting a check after the names of the inspirers. But perhaps this is unreasonable. It may be fair to maintain that every teacher has some spark of the kindling power, and that in his work he ought to apply it to combustible minds. There is the real issue: Should all teachers have for an object what few can fully attain? One of us ordinary persons, with some skill in simple matters of knowledge or clearness, can guide a class to a reasonable understanding of a book; if we are in a fine (and artificial) frenzy of making-them-love-it, much of our work is vitiated; the total effect of a recitation may be a lesson in insincerity. Especially is this true of women teaching boys, because the roughest boy is a delicate galvanometer for detecting affectation.

How frank and deep-rooted is this love of literature which we are so conscious of, which we talk and write about so much? It has always appeared to me that the non-musical

person who has trained himself to enjoy sonatas is the one who declaims most about loving music (and leaves me cold); while one who has music in his soul will rap my clumsy fingers—and kindle me. Aren't we English teachers in danger of appearing to be sentimental enticers if in our age of steamships we play the part of sirens on Literature Straits?

Only three years ago that question would have been considered blasphemous. Now you may hear affirmative answers on all sides. I subjoin three extracts from the *English Journal* for 1915. The first describes the danger; the second and third are two different ways of facing it.

1

A third misconception regarding English work is that it is the mission of the teacher of English to get pupils to admire greatly a small list of works of good literature of a particular type, and that when they do not specially care for these books the work is largely a failure. But human life has a wide diversity of feelings and interests, it is embodied in personalities of every kind and type. If literature is an expression of human life, or if literature is an appeal to human life, it must be as varied as the life of which it is the expression or to which it makes appeal. If a certain type of literature does not appeal to a pupil, it may be simply because the outlook of his mind on life gives it a range of interests which that literature does not satisfy.

Not long ago I had a conversation with a friend, a man who has some position and reputation as an educator, and in reply to some enthusiastic words of mine on the value and significance of poetry, he said: "I cannot bring myself to care much for poetry. I do not see why a man should care to read such stuff when he can read something worth while on as interesting a subject as evolution." Much of what the teacher presses upon the pupil's notice as the most valuable literature this man rejected as mere stuff; and yet he was regarded as a man of much intellectual ability.

We need to remember that a pupil who in spite of all our efforts thinks that *The Sketch Book* is dull, and *Evangeline* silly, and *Ivanhoe* slow and uninteresting may still cherish some valuable intellectual interests.

—*Roland S. Keyser*,
Jamaica Training School for Teachers.

2

We teachers of literature find ourselves in a different position from our colleagues. We speak of literature as primarily a thing to be *enjoyed.* Other departments treat their subjects as primarily things to be learned. We expect our pupils to be interested and delighted, from the outset of their work, and all the way along. Our colleagues ask *their* pupils to *work* and *learn,* and, if they hold out any hope of pleasure, it is, "You'll like it better when you come to understand it; it will be interesting when you get farther into it." We have got our problem clouded. We know well enough, we teachers of English, that we have ourselves had to do real work to come by some of our interests. And we know, too, that some fields of literature, some books, some authors, will never interest us. We don't see our task clearly, as the teacher of mathematics sees his. He says to his pupils, "Here is a piece of work to be done." He is not likely to say anything about interest or pleasure. If the pupil does the work, and enjoys it, so much the better. But pleasure is not held out as a bait. There is no cajolery about it. Now the danger about cajolery is that, though it works well enough when it succeeds, it is worse than nothing when it fails. Unsuccessful cajolery reacts against its author like an unsuccessful lie. And lying is a difficult business, Hamlet's remark to the contrary notwithstanding.

Now many of our indirect attempts to arouse interest and pleasure react against our influence because they fail in this way. What wonder that the pupil comes to disregard our judgment, question our intellectual weight, distrust our sincerity? Such a book is to be read "for pleasure." The pupil finds it dull, even though it be a great novel, like *Henry Esmond.* He has been

misguided; he has been told of an intellectual garden of bliss, and, lo, he finds no such place, only a waste of stones and ashes.

Why not assume a different attitude? Why not say, rather: Here are some typical books of various kinds. They are chosen because they have been approved, not only by those who make courses of study, but by generations of those who know, and like, and even those who write, books. They are an important part of the intellectual property of the race to which it is your fortune, good or bad, to belong. You are expected to know them, and others like them, if you are to become educated—even moderately educated. They are as much an established part of your educational obligations as science, history, mathematics are in your present grade, or as arithmetic, geography, and spelling were in your earlier years. You are expected to know them for reasons of about the same sort that you are expected to dress neatly, to speak clearly, to have good manners, and to obey the moral law—because your fellow-men demand it of those who qualify for a certain stratum of social life.

—*Franklin T. Baker*,
Teachers College, Columbia University.

3

Sometimes the high-school course works as a sort of vaccination to prevent their ever taking literature seriously. Indeed, many of our graduates emerge triumphantly diplomaed, with their old untrammeled originality in spelling and sentence structure, but with a new relief in their hearts that they have lived through "litercher" and may hereafter read what they please. And the public, which devotes about ninety-nine per cent of its influence to bringing about this very result, does occasionally use the remaining one per cent in sternly demanding to know why English teachers don't teach English and develop a taste for real "literachoor." (It will be noticed that the amount of emphasis on the final syllable is an index to the speaker's seriousness.)

The truth is that literature teachers are devoted champions of a lost cause. To change the figure, they are swimmers battling

against an ever-strengthening current of seething modernity. Today it is harder than it was even ten years ago to arouse any sympathetic interest in Milton, for instance. Some of the dead authors appear to be so irrevocably dead that no amount of artificial respiration can put any breath of life into their works, so far as the ordinary high-school student is concerned.

* * * *

From my previous experience with separate classics I had discovered that many students feel vaguely that these old books are forced upon them by an educational conspiracy. They do not believe for a moment that any normal person would freely choose Shakespeare's plays and the *Spectator* essays when reading for his own enjoyment. They do not formulate their suspicions, but they might put them thus: "In the undated past a group of old fogies put their noddles together and agreed that certain musty, fusty volumes should be called classics, and that every unfortunate youngster should finish his quota of this moldy diet before being allowed any real literary food or candy. Since then, whenever a board engages a teacher, it makes her solemnly swear to pretend that she and everybody else prefer the classics to all modern literature. And so the teachers don't dare to admit their liking for living authors, but have to earn their salaries by going into superlatives over Shakespeare and Addison and the other dead ones. The more a teacher praises a thing, the less good it is, just to read; she has to praise it to keep her job and prove what a great scholar she is. The thing for a student to do is to keep his mouth shut about not liking a classic, and just learn what the teacher wants him to say; for she would fail him if she knew what he really thought."

There is also a prejudice against the biography of authors as being a useless and inexpressibly tiresome hodge-podge of names and dates. A student's impression of a composite author's biography would read something like this: "So-and-so was born in an unpronounceable, unspellable place that nobody ever heard of; his parents, though poor and apparently insignificant, were people of great interest in literature. He was not on good terms with his

teachers, because he preferred his own choice of studies and occupations to theirs; and his fame later on showed how much better he knew what he needed than they did. By-and-by he married a woman who either made him superlatively happy and successful, or else broke his heart and crippled his genius. His early writings were attacked by school teachers and other moss-backed critics, but he won fame by touching the great heart of the common people; or else his work was very popular in his own day, but nobody can see anything in it now. All his life was spent in places hard to remember, doing things with dates nailed to them; and he finally died and was buried in another place that the teacher makes everybody learn. *What of it?*"

* * * *

In addition to these prejudices against old books, against biography, history, and the essay, there is also a well-marked distrust of poetry, especially on the part of boys. The number of high-school students who voluntarily read anything more than humorous or topical verse is small indeed. Many boys have an ingrained dislike of poetry, because some teacher has overdone allegories, or figures of speech, or "speaking pieces," to use the old term. Besides, many boys at the adolescent age manifest a fierce shyness, an utter revolt against the expression of emotions. Some poetry strips the soul stark-naked by its intensity of feeling. Imagine the difficulties of teaching it to self-conscious boys and girls. The high-school student is just at the age of most painful sensitiveness: it is astonishing to learn what trifles cause real suffering. Even skilful and kindly teachers frequently jab bare nerve ends without the faintest idea that they are doing so. Bold and self-assured as some of the lads look, they secretly writhe under many forms of embarrassment. The study of literature, and, most of all, the study of poetry, is the very thing they need to free and broaden their sense of personality, to develop and guide their emotions. But unless they can be made to feel at home in what they read, it is worse than useless to them.

* * * *

Another very common difficulty is the fact that many children early form the dreadful habit of reading without visualizing. Their imaginations are atrophied, so far as the power of reincarnating a printed page is concerned. Some actually have almost no power to get the thought of a poem, a bit of description, or even a drama, until it is read aloud and discussed in class. To translate words into pictures, statues, perfumes, music, or human reality of any kind is almost beyond their power. The teacher has to give them constant training to develop their imagination.

* * * *

Pondering over these prejudices and limitations of the average high-school student, I decided that absolute sincerity and coöperation should be the two guiding principles of my work with my literature classes. My first step was to take my students into my confidence, get acquainted with them, and make them realize that I was deeply interested in their real opinions and would never penalize them for telling the truth. Knowing that students love to experiment, and to do things in a grown-up way, I told them how the course in English literature was usually taught, and how we were trying to improve the method. I made it clear that my purpose was to teach them how to *know* literature, how to read and judge it; and that their likes and dislikes were entirely their own affair. From the beginning to the end I tried to make them feel that everybody's business was to help everybody else without interfering with his personal rights, and that I would hold sacredly confidential anything that they told me upon that agreement, or anything which they asked me not to share with the class.

Day by day in informal conversations, I gradually led them to tell me what they thought a course in English literature ought to be, what kinds of training they needed most, what are the big problems in studying literature. If I had expounded these ideas to them, they would have rejected them as part of the traditional stuff that teachers are paid to cram down the student's throat. But when they discovered problems for themselves, their whole attitude toward literature began to change. For instance, they

began with a vague idea that the materials for such a course should all be chosen upon the basis of enjoyment. But when they had heard the various contradictory opinions in a single class about a bit of literature, they saw at once that no choice could be made that would please everybody; and they lost confidence also in the old idea that only teachers like certain things. Then they decided that it would be wisest to study all the "great" things.

It took me about two weeks to make my students feel that it was safe to tell me what they really thought, and that I was not trying to make everybody agree with me. No matter how rash and prejudiced an opinion was, I received it seriously, pointed out and had the class point out the grain of truth in it, and then by questioning the student and others tried to make them carry the idea farther. As soon as I felt sure that they trusted my sincerity and would express themselves freely to me, I had them write answers to a questionnaire.

* * * *

The students were so interested in the idea of helping me fit the course to their needs that they wrote from two to six pages of definite information on these questions. This set of pages was the most interesting set I ever read because of their frank revelation of the minds of the writers. They formed a very valuable index to the hundred and forty new personalities in my charge. I tabulated on cards the gist of each answer, and for some time continued to add discoveries, and to consult these personality cards whenever I wanted to wake up a lagging student or assign an appropriate piece of individual research work. The teaching of literature is fundamentally a matter of interpreting different minds to each other; the teacher has to know intimately both the book and the student before she can bring them together successfully.

* * * *

Since I laid no emphasis upon their *liking* the famous pieces of literature, but instead demanded that they know a great deal about it and have full reasons for their opinions, it was no longer a point of honor with the students to dislike classics. Some of

them discovered that they could learn nearly as much and do nearly as good thinking about a thing they disliked as about a thing they liked. A good many of them learned to look within for the causes of certain opinions, frankly criticized their own lack of mental energy, imagination, observation, vocabulary, and the like, and set about improving themselves. They gradually learned to regard anybody's opinion about any piece of literature as a mere personal symptom, and often a temporary symptom at that, and they gained interest in looking for the cause of the opinion. And all the time the range of their enjoyment broadened.

—*Elizabeth Hodgson*,
High School, Wichita, Kansas.

End of the chapter written in 1916.

I smiled as I read the chapter because of the "irreducible element of pretense and humbug" in it. I did not frankly say what I thought, but took a polite pose and hinted. Though it is true in one sense that "I do not know that I ever induced one human being to like a piece of literature," yet in the ordinary school sense it is hardly true; perhaps my dramatizing of Falstaff and the field-mouse has roused the average amount of liking. It is only half true that "an effort to convert pupils to the beauties of literature is a noble instinct," for the chances are even that it is an egotistic instinct. It is hardly half of the truth that "I should like to echo what is so conventionally warm and human." What I should really like to do, and ought to do, is to echo the remarks that ordinary boys make on their way to a swimming-hole after an ordinary teacher of thrice their age has been dilating on the beauties of the host of golden daffodils.

But I shall commit no such rash act. The reason for abstaining from rashness is that the whole subject of reading is to many people a sacred one, so that no good can be done by a materialistic commentary. My personal fear, if

it interests you to hear it put plainly, is that reading has been sentimentalized and swathed in pretense, that novices are taught to dilate upon it with sentiment and pretense, that this kind of work alienates boys from the reading that they need so much.

I had best quote something that was said by a woman, Miss Sarah E. Simons. In *English Problems in the Solving* she shows on what my fear is based. After saying, "*If* we can create in the pupil a taste for reading," she explains the *if:* "That such a taste is largely non-existent is shown by the survey recently made in the junior and senior high schools of Decatur, which is probably typical of what prevails in most other school communities." When Miss Simons says "largely non-existent" and "probably typical," she means what she says. Don't suppose that she is mistaken until you have at least a fifth of her knowledge.

She was corroborated by a witness who may sound to you extreme and gloomy, but whose article in the *English Journal* for April, 1920, was temperate and constructive. Dr. E. W. Dolch thus spoke of the freshmen at the University of Illinois, with whom he had an intimate acquaintance for several years: "These freshmen had studied English in high school for at least three years. During each year they had devoted to the subject five periods a week for about nine months. Most of this time (in spite of the announced 2-3 plan) had been given to what are considered literary masterpieces. From this amount of time and energy on the part of their teachers they had acquired *no* taste beyond one for magazine fiction, *no* interest in the world of books, and *no* standards for judging good from bad in the art of imaginative writing."

"Standards for judging good from bad"—have you assumed that you can apply those standards and that you are to teach boys and girls to apply them? Doubtless you have,

and doubtless you should. You may be right in taking it for granted that the novels of Harold Bell Wright and Zane Grey are contemptible. That is a general creed among us teachers, who cannot abide the pasteboard figures and the stilted style. To us it is not conceivable that these books should ever rank as literature.

But don't be cocksure. Learn from my mistake in this matter to be humble and go warily. I used to talk freely about Zane Grey as an undesirable citizen in the world of letters, and I took his name as a standard illustration. A few months ago I read these words in the *Bookman:* "We should like to appraise Zane Grey as the modern Cooper, and find what you think about it. Do you realize that Cooper, Poe, and Mr. Grey are the three American authors most read in foreign languages?" While I am writing this chapter, I encounter in the *Saturday Review of Literature* an essay by T. K. Whipple, who, though he admits that Zane Grey's style is stiff, his matter melodramatic, his characters crude, and his criticism of life not valid, comments thus: "If Zane Grey must be classified, let it be with the authors of *Beowulf* and of the Icelandic sagas. Mr. Grey's work is a primitive epic, and has the characteristics of other primitive epics. His art is archaic, with all the traits of all archaic art. . . . He has the power which Stevenson so admired of projecting these high moments in memorable pictures. . . . He differs from many nature-lovers in that his fervor is altogether genuine. . . . He possesses a powerful imagination, of the myth-making type, which glorifies and enlarges all that it touches."

How dare I continue to make fun of Zane Grey or of the boys who agree with this critic's praise? Perhaps I have been a prig, setting up a barrier of pedantic prejudice before the natural impulses of youthful emotions. It is unsafe for me to think of "setting up a standard." I ought to be

eagerly and sympathetically curious about the standard that youth has everywhere set up. Why try to indict the younger generation of a whole nation? The attempt may be the suicide of my influence.

Before we can have any influence with students, we must learn to adapt ourselves to their tastes. The peril of trying to adapt students to our tastes can be shown by describing an extreme case of theorizing. It was the serious proposal of a woman whose position in the academic world is far above mine, who is an accomplished scholar and has a charming personality, who is a successful teacher of literature in a college for women. She writes a graceful article in which she argues that if a certain classic were read with the right spirit in all American schools, the danger of another great war would be minimized. Don't laugh, for this is serious business. Just such a woman actually wrote just such an article and in all solemnity urged her faith upon novices. What do you think the effect would be on you if you took up the classic in Smithboro with this grand purpose? What would be the effect on the influence for good reading that you want to exert? If you cannot guess what I think, then this whole chapter will forever remain without meaning for you, and you will teach literature in a sphere that I shall never enter. If you can guess what I think, but do not agree with me, then this chapter will be useless to you. But if you can agree, you will understand my fear about nerving yourself for any ulterior purpose whatever when you advise students about their reading. You will know to what extent you can act a part and set a trap for downright boys and girls in this second quarter of the twentieth century. Would your own instincts, unstirred by any preachments, ever lead you to think of "spiritual enlarging and kindling"? Have you actually, in your own round of life, ever known a person whose "character had

been molded by the influence of literature"? If you lug into your emotions any second-hand sentiments about reading, the boys will instantly detect you for a faker. They will respect whatever conviction about reading springs in your mind unprompted.

Now that I have said so much of a negative sort, I should like to write a positive chapter on the possibilities of achievement in showing students what reading is. The possibilities are unlimited. If I were to put my thoughts about them into print, I should begin where Edwin Greenlaw began when he spoke to high-school students about "reading as adventure."* He took for his text Keats's sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" and expanded the idea in words like these:

> Keats described his adventures in reading. . . . He is speaking of the new world of delight that opened to him when he came upon Chapman's translation of Homer. . . . You can conceive of no more thrilling experience than to have stood with the great explorer who first of our race looked upon the broad expanse of the Pacific. . . . It was to be compared only with the thrill that came to the astronomer in those days when Galileo's telescope was yet so new that the astronomer might hope to find with it a planet hitherto unknown. Like these adventures of the action-world, says the poet, was the experience that came to him when the riches of Homer's great poem were suddenly revealed. The world of Homer, known only through his book, was as real as the new-found planet or the mighty ocean.

There is the whole clue to a real interest in reading. If a teacher cannot follow it, if reading is not actually an adventure to him, he will not stimulate young people to reading. Any chapter that attempted to instruct or inspire him would only make him affected and less efficient. But if any

**Literature and Life*, Book One, "An Introduction."

teacher feels within himself, spontaneously, that reading is an adventure for him, he will, without any aid from anybody, communicate the feeling to boys and girls who have any instincts for the Western Islands of Literature.

But he will not expect to fly on a magic carpet to the Darien where students will look at each other with a wild surmise. He will not invite young radio experts to feel like some watcher of the skies as they gape at Chapman's heptameter:

> Achilles' baneful wrath resound, O Goddess, that imposed.

Oh, no. He will do what Professor Greenlaw did—begin at home with the pure serene of humor that is in the whitewashing of a fence by Tom Sawyer.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

A. Seeing the Picture

The most useful story I ever heard about the teaching of literature was related to me one night in the lobby of a Milwaukee hotel by a man who had been inducting a freshman class into *The Lady of the Lake.* I have often rehearsed it from platforms, and have found that it reveals, as if it were a spotlight at a wrong angle, the pasteboard scenery that decorates our stage of literature. I assure you that the story is literally true, uncolored and unexaggerated.

The class had wrestled with that harp that moldering long had hung and was trying to visualize the scene in the opening stanzas. Scott took pains to make a picture full of vivid details, so that a reader might start with a definite impression of the setting. You recall some of the lines:

> The stag at eve had drunk his fill
> Where danced the moon on Monan's rill,
> And deep his midnight lair had made
> In lone Glenartney's hazel shade.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Tossed his beamed frontlet to the sky.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> A moment snuffed the tainted gale.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> With one brave bound the copse he cleared.

The teacher detected something peculiar in an answer to a very commonplace question about this setting of the poem. Fortunately for him and for that portion of the

world that likes a funny story, his mind was not keyed to "an affection that springs from delight," but was curious to find out what mental picture was in the mind of this boy who answered so oddly. He directed his probe with a genius that will always excite my admiration and that should inspire the rest of us to emulation. He inquired, "What is a stag?" Remember, else you will lose the point of this section, that the boy's answer was not taken from *Judge* or *Life*, but was given in an actual classroom. He replied, "Why-uh, a stag is—is when a fellow hasn't got any girl." (Laughter.)

You laugh at the "limited vocabulary." Stop laughing and think of what a certain notable passage of literature had meant to that boy. It was this sort of stag who had drunk his fill—not improbably he had been drinking at Monan's Grill. It was this sort of stag who made a "lair" at midnight. What the beacon red was, or the warder call, or the beamed frontlet, will never be known, but we can guess at "the tainted gale"—it was natural for a stag who had been at Monan's until midnight. We know about the copse. The boy had pictured this kind of stag, after this kind of night, as having the vitality to leap over *several cops*. (More laughter, in spite of incredulity.)

Ever since I heard of that ingenious question, "What is a stag?" I have been a safer and sounder teacher of literature. Here is the lesson that we all learn somewhat, but never master: Go back to the beginning, assume no knowledge, start at the very bottom. If my mind is soaring to the prevention of war or the beatitudes of loving literature, I shall infallibly start a thousand miles beyond the beginning and talk of the monarchical souls of stags to students who do not know what a stag is. We teachers are forever directed to the ultimate in the work with literature, to the grand heights, to the thrilling conquests; and nobody ever

reminds us of the two feet with which we must walk. It is the *beginning* of all teaching that is hard and that requires art; anybody can rhapsodize about the grandeur of the summits. If you really want to climb Sinai in this age, and if you have no airplane, think of hobnails.

But don't mention them in conversation with anyone who has not taught in the ninth year. If you do, he will look severe and talk to you in this wise: "Seeing the picture is only a small part of the teaching of literature. It leaves out of account all the interpretation and the broadening influences." There will be no use in retorting that you mean only a small part, the mere beginning. He will think you are narrow-minded and concerned with nothing beyond the beginning. I know he will, because I have talked with him on this very subject. He wants you to speak of achievements. Don't bother him with ways and means.

If your mind is at all like mine, you will feel that whenever you forget to "see the picture" first you are getting nowhere, and that whenever you attend to "the picture" you are on the right path.

The trouble with all of us in our reading is that we do not see. If I read an essay, I begin it with certain preconceptions and do not make the effort to see how the author is putting before me an entirely different conception. This was demonstrated once in a class of graduate students who were reporting on an assigned reading—a lively description of a certain French teacher's way of conducting a recitation on a poem of Lamartine's; the emphasis of twenty pages of the book was all on the teacher's attention to definite details, the scorn of second-hand answers, the demand that his pupils should observe exactly what pictures the poet made. Yet three-fourths of this graduate class reported generalities which were already in their minds, like "leading pupils to enjoy the skill of the poet."

It is the rare high-school student who has any conception of forcing himself to see the picture. For twenty years I used to prove this startlingly by the first lesson in *Macbeth.* The class of seniors who were to study the play would be told on the first day of the term the nature of their work with it: they must see what happened. "Tomorrow," I would say, "there will be a brief written test in which you are to prove to me that you have read attentively, with your eyes open." The next day they would be asked to describe the combat between Macbeth and Macdonwald, and not five in fifty of them could prove that their eyes had been open to an array of bloody and gruesome sights that is not paralleled in literature. Faithful boys who had read the short assignment three times and could tell glibly what the notes said were not able to recall more of the contest than that "Macdonwald fought very bravely, but after a while Macbeth conquered." Almost all of them were astonished when I held up before them the gallery of sights, pausing to let each make an impression: brandished steel . . . smoked . . . bloody . . . carved his passage . . . unseamed him . . . fixed his head. What could they ever hope to learn about characters and moral lessons until they had first learned to see a gory head on the battlements?

The difference between good literature and poor literature is that one is composed of visible, specific details; the other is a haze of the indefinite and the general. The difference between Raphael and a second-rate artist is that Raphael detected and put on to canvas those details that compose an individual face, whereas the poorer workman cannot see or record such details. The difference between me and a musician is that he hears the slight variations; I can distinguish tones in only a general way. The difference is what Carlyle tried to define by saying "capacity for taking infinite pains"; literary genius has power to see and record

the slight variations in conduct that make one character different from another. Carlyle's message to the world was a cry for the eye that can see formulas.

The ordinary student believes that an editor's notes are gospel. He will tell us that Macbeth "thought he saw a ghost" and that of course this was a hallucination and there wasn't any ghost. Press him for his reason, and he will retort with "in the notes it says so." Tell him that the only evidence is in the lines which Shakespeare wrote, and he is puzzled. Ask him to fasten his eyes on what Shakespeare said, and he becomes distrustful. He has no conception of what it is to look with his own eyes and see what the evidence is. Any boy is made a new creature when he first accepts the idea that Hamlet's sanity is not determined by notes, but by what a reader can see and hear in the play. It is incredible how the eyes of most students are fastened dully on somebody else's opinion and how slowly they open to see the facts that are before them. No, it is not incredible; for it is true of us all that we live largely by formulas which we have learned to repeat, and never have the curiosity to gaze squarely at realities. If you want to shape young lives by teaching literature, begin with this task of prying their eyes open. When you have become an adept, you can look about for further ways to exercise your skill.

We shall never comprehend how difficult it is to open eyes and see a picture that is right before us. Years after I thought I had comprehended, I had an experience that made me want to begin my career all over again. It was in a choice band of ten honor-boys from the senior class, selected because they were proficient in composition and had an ambition to read. No lessons were assigned, no schedule of work posted. They were to report at intervals what their reading had been; our informal daily sessions were to be free for any form of discussion they wished. The pleasure

of such a class was too good to be true. I suggested that, instead of trusting too much to haphazard, it might be well to direct our meetings for a few weeks toward some definite purpose, and I inquired about "seeing the picture" as worth attention for a time. They had nothing better to offer, and it was so ordered. I told them of how last year's class had failed to see what sort of person the speaker is in "My Last Duchess," and suggested that we might experiment with a few short poems which were not just what a careless reader would suppose. That night I happened upon these stanzas in the *Literary Digest:*

To an Inhabitant of Paradise

How goes it in your starlit world—
  The silences, the brooding wood?
Does there the tiger hunt no more,
  The falcon twitter for his hood?

Have you stript all the boughs that talk
  And calmed the torrents from the hill?
Are lamb and wolf now reconciled?
  Is hunger banished from your sill?

Does that inexorable whip,
  Which drove us heedless face to face,
No longer burn along your veins
  Or cut your new dispassionate grace?

Do you watch struggle unconcerned,
  Hear voices call you and not speak,
There in your timeless acres feel
  Above your kinship with the weak?

Oh, guard the gates that shut you in!
  Make sure the world behind your eyes!
My world of men and lust and wheels
  Begins to march on Paradise.

That is a very obscure piece of verse. I was puzzled by it at first and am not certain now that I understand it. A friend of mine has said of it, "I'm an old reader of poetry; yet, after two readings, I am not sure what this poem means." So it would have been improperly difficult as a school assignment if I had required an explanation that agreed with mine. But I asked nothing of the sort. I told the class that they were to read a mystery, warned them that the third stanza was some personal reference which was too much for me, and admitted that we might find ourselves all at sea as to the meaning of the other four stanzas. "But," I added, "it is a fair exercise in seeing pictures; read with close attention and report what you *see*." I asked each boy to bring with him the next day a brief written statement of what he thought the poem was all about.

One of the class, the only poet I ever taught, wrote a page that I could understand; the other nine made me doubt my senses. My own understanding of the poem made no difference to me; I was prepared to change it; I was prepared to accept five different views as equally tenable. What I could on no account accept was this idea, characteristic of all nine interpretations: "The poem is evidently the work of someone who, being dissatisfied with life and having committed some sin which bars him from Paradise, is fearful lest one more fortunate may lose the most precious thing to be had." Even the poet had found himself reading about a Christian paradise, heaven. Never was I so stumped by a set of papers. "Where did this heaven come from?" I asked the first boy. He acted as if I had asked him where the sun came from on a bright day; his mind could see nothing but heaven in the poem—"The title says 'Paradise'," he answered in a bewildered way.

"The title?" I responded. "I'm asking about the poem.

To make the question definite: read the first line aloud, slowly, and then tell us the word that suggests heaven." He seemed resentful. He couldn't claim that "goes it" was a heavenly expression; he could not claim that he had ever heard of starlight in heaven; he didn't see what I was driving at—no, not this capable, superior boy, chosen for ability in English. Then I attacked the second boy and asked what of heaven there was in the second line. Did "silences" suggest heaven? Had he some memory of a heaven that contained a "brooding wood"? He squirmed and was insulted. The third boy put up no claim that the tiger in the third line was reminiscent of heaven, though I assured him I would entertain such an argument, because the noble red men hunt in heaven, and I have no objection to their views. But he would not admit that he was pagan. Much less would the fourth boy pretend that an unhooded falcon had made him think of the regions of perpetual bliss.

"Where, then, did you find heaven?" was my question. "I refuse to drag it into the poem from the title. I must see it here in these twenty lines that we are looking at. I mustn't invent it; I must see it here before I believe it. I can't be expected to grant that you fellows have some theological second-sight, some paradisaical seventh sense. What were you looking at while you read? What will you point out to me to show that I have overlooked something?" So foreign to their way of thought was my challenge that they seemed not to want to meet it. I suppose they thought it was unpoetical to pay so much attention to the mere words of a poet. We spent one hundred twenty minutes with those twenty lines, not in a debate about interpreting the verses, but in an effort to find out whether seeing had anything to do with believing that a proposed meaning was right or wrong. The "lamb and wolf" was appealed to, and I admitted it was valid; but the boys lost interest

when they discovered that the Bible does not use the phrase in a description of heaven. The timeless acres and the gates and the marching on Paradise certainly suggest the Miltonic heaven, but no more. There are no words in the poem that make a picture of heaven. Some of these boys were good actors; so I appealed for dramatizing. "In what tone were all these questions asked?" I followed up with a variety of questions: "Does the questioner seem to think well of the person he addresses? Does he think that it is right or wrong to be 'above the kinship with the weak'? Does the questioner think that the other man lives in a sensible place or a foolish place? Does he think it is right or wrong to march against the place?"

If I had at the outset handed them my understanding, they would have accepted it—as they accept all notes by the editor—and they would have kept cheerful, and all would have been peace in our little English paradise. But there would have been no lesson in seeing the picture. Unless they drove themselves line by line to an admission that their eyes had been shut when they read, they would not have grown in the power of reading. But rather than prolong their irritation I asked where this Paradise was; I asked one of the class to be so good as to point to that portion of his anatomy which was "behind his eyes," and asked him what was there. This "world," this "Paradise" of the poem is in some man's brain. I asked if they had ever heard of a fool's paradise. They all had. They admitted that a title and some vaguely realized biblical references had tricked them into an utter misunderstanding of a bitter satire against a clergyman who, like a fool, does not perceive what modern social unrest means. Perhaps Mr. Middleton would think I interpret as blindly as the boys; I am not assuming that I penetrate through his veils of allegory. But at least I have tried to see his pictures and

not to see the pictures that already exist in the world that is back of my eyes and between my ears. I have tried to see into his world. Until a student has learned to make that effort, he has not begun to study literature. And he will not progress to better citizenship and all the other glories and virtues until he has first made the beginning by opening his eyes and looking at what is on the page.

"Seeing the picture" seems, somehow, always to guide me right in my teaching. It seems to make the right appeal to students. They can use the phrase naturally and easily. It passes current among them and, when it has become familiar, directs their search for an author's message. I have recently met* an interesting proof of how likely students are not to see the plainest outline of an author's picture. Mrs. Blanche C. Redfield has prepared some sample questions for examinations. Read the following one and see how it strikes you:

> Beside the bed where parting life was laid,
> And sorrow, guilt, and pain by turns dismayed,
> The reverend champion stood.

Where was the champion?

Incredibly easy, do you suppose? Mrs. Redfield says that a majority of high-school students "take one line, and only one, as a whole that has no connection whatsoever with the preceding and the following verses." Instead of asking them to imagine the feelings which agitated the reverend champion, Mrs. Redfield has found it necessary to ask them where the champion was; for a majority of them do not know what *beside the bed* modifies, and do not put the bed and champion together in a mental picture. These three

*In G. M. Ruch's *Improvement of the Written Examination.*

lines of simple descriptive verse, with the kindergartenish question that follows, may reveal to you more about teaching literature in high school than all the lectures you have heard at college. The poet and the business man alike want students trained to see what is before their eyes.

B. What Books for the Course of Study?

In this section I am going to speak of choosing the books that are prescribed for the whole class—both those that are studied intensively and those that are taken up as supplementary reading. The choosing of prescribed books is largely a matter of selecting options in an established course of study; in making our choices we should be guided as far as possible by the same reasons that apply when we draw up a list for "outside" or "home" reading.

In all planning of a prescribed course in literature we are guided by two purposes that are quite different and that may often be opposed to each other. Hence anyone who tries to offer advice may seem to be contradicting himself. The first of these two purposes is to gain a knowledge of literature, to inform ourselves—just as we study history or geography for general culture. The prescribed course will therefore contain a very large proportion of "classics." Our enjoyment of these may have to be a secondary matter, as was capitally shown by Miss Hodgson in the previous chapter. It is my business as a teacher to impart a knowledge of the work of Pope or Ben Jonson or Burke, whether I like it or not; and it is the business of students to learn about such pieces of literature, whether they enjoy the study or not. That necessity of doing required work is to be understood in this chapter, and need not be spoken of again. It is that businesslike, informational purpose which has largely determined the course of study that you are to follow, and which

should guide you if you modify the course or plan one of your own.

All the emphasis of this section is to be on the second of the purposes, deriving pleasure from the study and reading of literature. Therefore the section would be untrue if it stood alone. It must be read as only one side of a truth.

What books, then, should we choose for our course when options are left to us and we select on the basis of making the work more attractive? This seems to be the great and irrepressible question in every teacher's mind. The right answer is "Choose what you like best." If you do not care for a book, how can you make it seem attractive to a class? If you are very fond of it, your enthusiasm is likely to be contagious.

There is one queer exception to that general truth. Ingenious teachers have sometimes announced their dislike of a certain book that is considered "good" or "improving" for students, and have shocked some of the better members of a class into reading the book and triumphantly feeling their superiority to the teacher by liking it.

The experiment is not recommended unless you are sure of yourself and your relations with the class. The principle underlying it is, however, the secret of all good teaching of literature—frankness. The thrill of wondering relief that comes to a boy when his teacher announces, unabashed, "I can't care for this classic," is beyond reckoning in its wholesome influence.

"What books shall I choose?" Teachers sometimes suppose that they have no choice. A woman once inquired of me, "What would you do if you had to teach *Macbeth* in the eighth year?" I replied that I gave it up and asked what the joke was. It was no joke. Her course of study obliged her to use the play in that year. A catalog of similar atrocities could be extracted from the courses of study that are

binding upon some teachers. If the icy hand of such a requirement has you in thrall, don't exhaust yourself by rebelling and repining. If you can see the humor of it, you will be able to cheer up the class and worry along somehow. Usually there are ways of evading the worst requirements. Probably your principal doesn't care much for *Paradise Lost* himself and doesn't want it foisted upon the ninth grade. Tell him that some leaders of thought about literaure for schools are advising that we use more of the modern books and only those older books which make a direct appeal to at least the better half of a class. You might read him this wholesome and humane statement of the case by Professor R. L. Lyman, of the School of Education in the University of Chicago.

> One of the shortcomings of the past has been a feeling on the part of pupils that literature is something that was written a long time ago, by men and women who knew nothing about the life we live today. One college senior asserted that in her four years of high-school work she never heard an English teacher say one kind word for any living author. It is indeed unfortunate that our pupils should get any such impression. Our pupils should be taught that literature is being written today by scores of men and women as they interpret the essentials of happy and successful living in the Twentieth Century. . . . In choosing books for a literature course we must therefore consider the capacity of the class even more than the contents of the books. . . . When Lucentio and Tranio (in *The Taming of the Shrew*) are discussing what studies shall be elected at the University of Padua, Tranio says, "No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en." And Lucentio replies, "Well dost thou advise." The modern teacher who cannot sympathize with these eager students is lost.

If you make protests, not for your own sake, but for the sake of the boys and girls who may acquire a lifelong distaste for literature, your chance of success is good.

"Yes, but what books shall I choose?" You have already looked ahead to see what prize list of captivating titles I am offering, and are sad because it is not in sight. There are pamphlets innumerable that were compiled with great labor to answer this universal question. Teachers pore over them and then ask again, "What books would you recommend?" I am tempted to offer a short list of some of my own favorites, but experience teaches me that this is unsafe, more likely to do harm than good. One form of answer, however, I will venture to give: use the two compendious lists of tested books that are described in the next section. There you may prospect for possibilities that you do not know of; the lists will show you what to experiment with. Both were designed for home reading and deal largely with recent books, but they are good sources of ideas for prescribed books.

The question makes me uneasy. I always want to counter with another: Why do you want anybody to tell you what to read? The training that a college gave you for teaching was mainly concerned with literature; you must have read several hundred books that might interest young people; if you take any real pleasure in your own reading, you must be able to sympathize with the pleasures of students. Why do you want guidance in such a matter that varies with the personality of every teacher? Wouldn't it be wise to look in your own mind for the answer? To learn not to want to ask the question is your profession.

C. Outside Reading

This topic is, in the main, not to be separated from the question of choosing books for class work, but differs in several particulars.

What is chosen for class work may properly be a task, like history; a teacher is under no obligation to make it

winsome. But for "home" or "outside" reading the books should be elective, chosen by a student because he wishes entertainment or information or familiarity with good literature. Here there is need of a long list of options; other teachers are always making discoveries that will be helpful to you. One useful collection of information of this sort is *Books for Home Reading*. It consists of many lists, graded and classified, for the high school and the junior high school; it was prepared for the National Council by a committee of which Mr. Herbert Bates was chairman, a man who is peculiarly fitted for this work and whose industry earned the gratitude of the Council. Send fifteen cents to The National Council of Teachers of English, 506 West 69th Street, Chicago. Another pamphlet that appeals strongly to me is *Annotated Home Reading List*, a copy of which may be had by sending ten cents to Professor H. G. Paul, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois. This list has been compiled on the principle that "to the boy or girl the recommendation of a classmate is worth ten-fold the valuation by a teacher or librarian." There is a brief description of each book that is named in the thirty-five pages. Miss Chamberlain and Miss Carter, who prepared the list, vouch that it contains "only those books which have been read and enjoyed by many young people."

The best list for your own school will be built by that method—working gradually during several years, using reports from student readers as to what they like and why. Make every effort to have the outside-reading suggestions come from students and be their record.

Books read for class work are checked from day to day or by examinations, but no teacher wants to reduce outside reading to this level of routine. Still, human nature being what it is, there must ordinarily be some device for guaranteeing that books have been honestly read. This is the

puzzle that agitates us all and that is not yet solved. One method, very widely used, is book reports; each student reports, according to a set scheme or by filling in blanks, on the facts about the book and the features that interested him. I never liked this, and most teachers find faults in it. It is apt to lead to cheating by copying of others' reports; it is a mountain of work for the teacher; it takes the edge off students' enjoyment. Some teachers establish such an honor system that they can rely on the word of students that reported books have been fully read. Another possibility is to ask a student to answer two questions about the book he reports; the questions should be quite simple and direct, of such a sort that a good reader could answer them readily, but searching and particular enough so that a bluffing student could not answer them. Probably the method of taking a signed statement from each student about each book, that he has read with only a reasonable amount of skipping, is safe and convenient for most schools. I think the reasonable amount of skipping ought to be a proviso, because all good readers ought to know how to skip.

As for credits to be given, most schools arrange a system of points, giving from 1 to 12 (or sometimes more) according to length and difficulty. Each student is required to earn a certain number of points each term. It is doubtful whether there is any wise way of counting these as credits in the total English mark; general practice is to consider them a requisite without which English credit cannot be earned.

Outside reading ought to be, and I think generally is, such a genuine sort of diversion combined with duty as we all set for ourselves. I expect to read some nonsense this winter and some heavy matter that will not be all joy. Young people ought to do the same. There is a place for Zane Grey and any modern favorite; there ought to be a place for authors who used to be favorites.

D. What Is a Classic?

It was the prevalent hypocrisy of us English teachers that gave a vogue to Mark Twain's definition of a classic as a book that everybody talks about and nobody reads. We have brought reproach on ourselves and are now doing our best to dig out from under it. It looks as though the odium attaching to "classics" is making the word unusable, and it may have to be abandoned.

The truth students need about a classic is that it was once read. Every classic was once modern trash. Think of *Hamlet.* We can imagine how a master at Eton in the spring of 1602 would urge boys to improve their minds by familiarity with classics like the deathless plays of Plautus and Terence, and not to waste their time on the crude, slap-stick stuff that was being produced in London. We can imagine how this fired some irreverent Eton boys to play hookey and see the trash at the Globe Theater, in the most disreputable quarter of the city, amidst side-shows and inclosures where dogs fought bears. The London theater district would have made Broadway or Hollywood look like Sunday-schools. We can see these despisers of classics slipping into a coarse audience of base rascals where respectable women could not show themselves, hearing with joy the honest-to-goodness talk in the racy idiom of the day about a ghost, thrilling at all the murder, cheering at the clowns. We know how they returned to school with tall talk about the bully play they had seen and what fun it was compared with the required reading of a classic. A classic has always been like that. In my boyhood I was grudgingly allowed to read a piece of worthless trifling called *Innocents Abroad;* now teachers give credits, coaxing boys to read that same piece of classic humor. We teachers used to make the *Saturday Evening Post* a synonym for all

that is cheaply modern; when I am twenty years older, I may see reading-lists that try to cajole girls into reading some of the worth-while classics which originally appeared in the *Post*.

Any classic that you introduce will always remain dead unless you can show how it was once the newest entertainment of its time. The *Spectator Papers* were an indolent way of beginning the day, scorned by school-teachers. Bryant would doubtless have been reproved by his parents for wanting to read what Irving, a dashing young journalist in New York, was writing—say a flippant satire on history. Every classic was once the forbidden truck of its day. Some prejudice against it will disappear when students know that it used to be disreputable.

E. The Persons in Literature

Every piece of literature was made by a human being. Now, it is true for us adults that his looks and personal habits have nothing to do with the quality of his work. But you are not conducting a class for old and critical people. You are leading a band of youngsters who are hungry for a person. To them an author is a label pasted on a mummy-case. If you can show them that he was alive, they will be most astonished and most grateful. Scott's hounds and early-morning coffee have great virtue in an English class. Let boys know that Wordsworth was the sort of man who planted his cottage in a placid scene, when he might just as well have had a view of the cliffs of Skiddaw; be enough of a mischief-maker to tell them how conceited Emerson found him. Shelley, as a name in literature, is a hieroglyphic; as "the guy that was drowned and his body was burned and Byron lit the fire"—that's different.

I should not dare write this section if other teachers did not find their classes just like mine in this regard. Your course of study may advise you that biography has no relation to literary values, and the statement may be true; I don't know how to argue. I am just stating the fact that boys thirst for the person behind the classic, are amazed that there was a person there, are delighted to see him and finger him all over, and then feel altogether different about what he wrote. See if your boys are different.

There are persons in the literature that you read. There is nothing else there which youth cares anything about. It could almost be said that, even for critics, literature is an art of personifying things; certainly it is so for boys and girls. The art of teaching literature to them is to make them feel and see and hear the interests of living people.

F. The History of Literature

It is the persons in literature that make a study of the history of literature worth while. I cannot recall that I have ever seen in print any defense of that subject. It is usually derided as an aggregate of dates which have nothing to do with literature and which students despise. Apparently the subject has been taught as if it were a mortuary record or a chronicle of the kings of classics. So taught, it is doubtless as bad as it is painted. I will not uphold it as a subject, for it may be so liable to abuse that it ought not to be allowed in curriculums. But if it deals with personalities and does no more with dates than to set up a general time-scheme, it can be of great benefit.

Perhaps the textbooks have been more at fault than teachers. Most of the books are vitiated by critical phraseology and the use of abstract terms. If you are allowed to choose, decide against a book which says that the Saxons

"worshiped gods who were the personification of the forces of nature" and choose the one which says that they made the Christian missionaries preach on a little island in the open air because "they had no idea of hearing strange teachings under a roof where magic might easily overpower them." The difference between those two presentations is the difference between sleep and waking. Discard the book that refers abstractly to Goldsmith's eccentricities and adopt the one that names the scarlet breeches. Try to gather anecdotes and striking facts about authors; aim at some picture of them as persons; endeavor to convey a definite impression about the one most striking feature of an author's work. It is much better to omit half the writers and concentrate on the big names than to secure an indiscriminate blend of many authors. A chart will do more in a minute to rescue Marlowe from the twelfth century than half an hour of rehearsing dates.

G. Figures of Speech

This seems like an odd little topic to introduce at this point among such big ones. It is here because it is large. More than you suspect, the difficulty that an ordinary student has in literature is a failure to understand what a figure of speech is. A literal student is dumfounded by Carlyle, because he finds himself one moment on firm ground of fact, and the next moment floundering in allegory and hurtled into thin air by a simile. The description of Satan winging his way through chaos could be fitly applied to this student when he puckers his brows over essays or poetry.

To give thorough instruction in figures of speech is a long and difficult process, one which I do not recommend as part of a course in literature; but I think I should have been helped very much in my early years of teaching if

someone had pointed out to me how ignorance of metaphors interferes with the study of literature. Suppose, as an illustration, that Margaret Pye is beginning to read the third chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities:*

> I enter a great city by night. . . . Every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there is a secret to the heart nearest it. Something of the awfulness even of Death itself is referable to this. No more can I turn the leaves of this dear book that I loved, and vainly hope in time to read it all. No more can I look into the depths of this unfathomable water—

The whole first paragraph is a mystification to Margaret because it jumps from death to books and water, then back to death. She does not understand that Dickens, like all authors, is making a comparison, that he fears to be dull if he merely recites the fact that "death prevents me from continuing to grow more intimately acquainted with a friend." Dickens, like all authors, wants to make his thought picturesque and suggestive of other thoughts. So he compares the friend to a book that he had begun to read, and then to water in which he had glimpsed submerged treasure. This is a figure of speech. In all Margaret's encounters with figures of speech she will be mystified until she understands that she is reading a *comparison*, that she must see what the author is really talking about and must notice to what he *compares* this. To you and me that fact is so obvious and simple that we never think to speak of it, but to Margaret it will be a revelation. When she has seen it, the difficult passages of literature will have lost much of their mystery.

To teach formally the classifications of figures of speech seems to me as ludicrous as it is wrong. It is ludicrous because no text or teacher can be sure where the line is drawn between metonymy and synecdoche. It is wrong because no author ever knew or cared what type of figure he was using.

H. Separating Literature and Composition

A question much discussed is whether literature and composition should be taught by the same or by different teachers. There are good arguments on either side, and I shall not present them, because for you the question is academic. Either you are in a small school and must teach both, or you are in a large school and have your work assigned to you. Probably you will suppose, as I do, that most of us would be better off, and our subject better taught, if each of us taught both composition and literature. That seems to be the trend of opinion, but nobody can predict.

A question of much more definite interest to you is whether literature and composition should be blended throughout the year or should be taught in different semesters. I have no strong feeling one way or the other about omitting literature for some months and concentrating on it for other months, though I should suppose a long gap without any literature would usually be a misfortune. I have a very strong conviction that there should never be any long period, not even a week, when composition is omitted. If an advanced class is proficient in mechanics, it might not suffer much harm if it did no writing for a month; but I have seen even my honor-class of seniors slip backward in composition if the attention is all on literature for a term. They have recognized it themselves and asked for a few themes. As educational conditions now are, while we strive with all our might to establish the rudiments even in higher classes, I do not see how any school can afford to let a week pass without theme work.

Literature and composition are often blended in our thoughts as two inseparable parts of one subject, equal in importance, equally necessary as a preparation for life. They have been more and more sundered during the last

decade, and I should guess that they will be largely divorced before long. The principal reason compelling this separation is that any employer of a high-school graduate can dispense with literature; at least he sees no tangible use of any particular instruction in literature that he knows about. The colleges, too, have very different feelings about the two branches: composition is an essential for any sort of education; the training in appreciating literature *can* be dispensed with in a non-cultural education.

In many good schools literature and composition are no longer lumped together as one subject which receives one grade. The student who can appreciate literature but cannot learn to express himself decently is not promoted. Until he qualifies in composition, he is conditioned in English. *The High School Curriculum* for Minnesota (see page 313) says on this point: "It is recommended that the student's grade in composition be not confused with his grade in literature."

Perhaps a sign of the times is in the remark of a principal, previously quoted: "I can find plenty of teachers who can exclaim about the beauties of literature." How widespread this irritated state of mind is I cannot say, but I know that it afflicts many men in responsible positions. They do not have to be anxious about literature; they lose sleep because of composition.

Quite likely the separation between literature and composition is a temporary adjustment that is due to our artificial treatment of literature. Possibly if the educational world turns to stressing modern books, the breach will heal again. Perhaps the literary study of the future will deal more with developing the mere power of understanding simple prose, rather than with emotional appreciation. If this should be the trend in literature, we may expect it to be reunited with composition. Be on the lookout for developments.

I. Testing Literature Lessons

I have never been able to teach literature in an ordinary class without the written tests on daily assignments. That fact need not disturb you, because many teachers seem to succeed without the tests. If you find, as I do, that your students are taught to read by the knowledge that they will face a written test, you may be deterred from this valuable exercise by the labor of correcting daily papers. When I read some published estimates of the time necessary for correcting hundred-word papers, I am bewildered; for a teacher, if he will do a little contriving, can learn to run them off at the rate of one a minute. If he learns the art, he can do an incalculable amount of good without an improper increase of labor. I offer a few hints about short and long tests, which you can experiment with.

It is better to have short and easy lessons, strictly graded, than longer assignments that are loosely accounted for. The same principle holds for examinations. Fairly simple and direct questions, graded more strictly, are better evidence of a pupil's knowledge and better training for him. He is spurred up by finding he did not know the easy topic; disgruntled and self-excusing if he thinks he failed because of catch-questions.

Every English examination must be understood to be a test in writing. Perfect knowledge and careless writing may be worth anywhere from 60 to 0, according to circumstances. It ought to be 0.

Always plan tests and examinations with a view to easy grading—that is, how much each part is going to count, and how definite are the units that you have a right to require.

Don't make an invalid of yourself by correcting papers. The more you can handle, the better. But make a time limit

of reasonable hours and refuse to be killed. Study ways of speeding up the correcting. Some sets of class tests can be graded in very short order, and with justice to all. You may pause to see if Susie has a sentence-error; but Algernon is known to be careful, and his paper shows at a glance that it is worth 100. Don't let the conscience destroy the nerves. Set an arbitrary standard (a good brain should have known enough, e.g., to put in reasonable order four points out of a possible six) and grade mechanically, always reserving the right, if it doesn't take extra time, to add a little credit for an original handling. Find the quick way. The excessive amount of time and nerve-force used by some teachers in marking papers is suicidal. Work easily. Keep the mill running. Never stop to debate the "mightn't I be unjust?" Always study for serenity and celerity.

J. Defending Camelot

In Milton's outline of school studies he proposes that Italian should be mastered in those odd moments not otherwise provided for. If one who has himself done a little teaching can be guilty of such sublime nonsense, what may you not expect to have urged upon you who teach "only English"?

I have heard a man describe how he taught his wife and daughter to swim before they went into the water. I am not joking; neither was he. If such a prodigy of tuition is reported, how ready will the world be to declare that you are an inefficient teacher of "just English."

The country is full of the records of wonderful results in mother-tongue instruction. Shall we waste in despair—you and I, the mediocre ones? Not until pedagogy is so developed that Italian is taught incidentally and swimming is learned by sprawling half an hour in the sand.

The world loves to wave before us these Miltonic dazzlements, to shame us with tales of English Edens newly made over there at the end of the rainbow by some god-like teacher. But if discouragement comes from hearing of lofty deeds of education, think of King Arthur. When the light and lazy Gawain proposed the quest of the Holy Grail, it was the king who inveighed against the splendid undertaking. Arthur granted the holiness of the project, but protested that it would ruin Camelot and restore paganism. His prophecy was fulfilled. It applies in fulness of wisdom to us knights of the Table Round of English. Our vows should not bind us to "follow wandering fires," but by plain tasks of knighthood to preserve Camelot.

K. This Changing Age

As you reach the end of a book which has continually told about the contrast between current theories and classroom facts, you are inclined to exclaim, "What is English? It is a mess!" Quite right, in a way. But don't judge that our age has lost its reason. The world we live in is fairly wise, after all, and has not gone mad about English. The truth is that we live at a time when precedent counts for nothing and when we are obliged to find out all over again what our subject is. No previous generation of teachers ever had to face such perplexities. I will point out some of the ways in which the grounds of opinion are moving beneath our feet and making all foundations of thought insecure.

In 1913 I was training boys to write for peace prizes, to argue that a great war could never come again because of the prevailing feeling of brotherly love among the nations. Somehow the happening of 1914 made my theories of life different. So gentle an art as teaching literature cannot remain unaffected by such a profound shaking of our minds.

When I began to teach, the Evolution Theory was something that professors of literature could shrug their shoulders at. Today it is featured in the newspapers and accepted as matter of course by many high-school students. So profound an alteration of the notions about human development must have some effect upon conceptions of literature—if literature is life.

Within the year a bishop of the Episcopal church has been convicted of heresy. He explained that when he comprehended modern measurements in astronomy he could find no place for heaven, and so had to believe that the human soul was confined to the world. His reasoning indicates how literature may seem different now from what it used to. The classics with which we struggle were conceived in a world of thought very different from our own.

All science has been altering modes of thought so rapidly that we are already looking back to 1880 as a dim, strange, distant, child-like age. If literature is life, this change in life must affect profoundly our feelings about any literature made a few decades ago. It is impossible for a middle-aged person to apprehend how different his mental adjustment in youth was from the adjustment of youth today.

Time was, not fifty years ago, when science was hardly granted a corner in the colleges, was looked down upon by all those who professed the humanities. The wonderful and romantic were then derived from the mind, from fancies and visions and imaginings and reasonings. Today the mind is seen to be a frippery source of mental excitement. Instead of literary fancies about "annihilating space and time to make two lovers happy," we see the mathematical fact that space and time are functions of each other. To the modern boy a Persian jinni is an absurdity; real romance is in the infinite spaces within an atom, where electrons whirl at (proportionally) stellar distances from each other.

Whereas forty years ago secondary schools were few, they are the architectural features of our cities now. Students were then few and fit; now they come in swarms; many of them are unfit. So rapid has been the growth of high-school systems that it has not been possible to develop a teaching profession to keep pace with them. The students then accepted a faith in literary tradition and would pretend to it if they had it not; today they will not pretend and do not have.

Since 1900 the whole face of civilization has altered. The world never before went through a period when such excitements as automobiles and movies and radio rendered the life of the previous quarter of a century tame and drab. All such excitements tend to make previous literature dull and obsolete. No wonder that the Grand Literary Tradition, so true and potent in my youth, looks like a ragged beggar today.

A generation ago schools plodded along, as farmers and physicians did, according to precedent. Now there is a general staff of educational experts that train an army of psychologists and statisticians and investigators who set our minds whirling with the new duties and wonders of education. No old educational belief is safe; every axiom is subject to question. Literature has not escaped the tempest of renovation.

Only a few short years ago kings were still romantic, drinking-songs were realistic, war was a glorious theme for literature; now a king is almost an anomaly, drinking means bootlegging, and the idea of war is to be removed from the schools of the world. These three examples show how the content of literature is altering its values and making every tenet about teaching it a shaky theory.

The Victorian world was one of pretense and concealment and dressing the parts; but youth today prefers direct

speech; it talks openly about subjects that I, poor old-fashioned teacher, must not name; it conducts life in careless, undress style and mocks at the formalities of twenty years ago.

The young of today are more honest and will make a more straight-forward world, a more sensible one, than we made. They see realities more clearly. They will not tolerate any of our old veils and hangings that used to surround literature.

The catalog could be extended, but here is enough to show that we live in a new world, a world that has changed, almost over night, to a condition of mind that cannot be comprehended by those who in the dear old days lived in accordance with the Grand Tradition of Literature. I do not presume to interpret it; that is the task for you, my dear Novice. We who are older look to you for the solution and have no doubt that you will find it; for you are a part of the new age and understand it. You know that it is honest and downright and laughs at illusions. If you are at one with it in spirit, you will find out what English is.

INDEX

INDEX

a, pronunciation of, 357, 395, 396
Abbreviations, 99
able words, 88, 100, 102
Absolutes, 191, 257
Absorbing style, 125
Accent, 68, 91, 100
Accident, 50
Accuracy, 298, 303; other references, 6, 18, 20, 24, 280, 294, 308, 326. See Correctness, Minimum Essentials
Accuracy first, 21-23
Acreage, 99
Across, 52
Accustomed, 41
Additive, 262
Addresses, 253, 254
Adjectives, 38, 178, 179, 193, 200; in *ous* and *us*, 107; compound, 117, 170, 193; predicate, 257; pronominal, 169; substantive, 182; pairs of, 247, 252
Adverbs, 195-197, 251, 254; distinguished from conjunctions, as independent, 129, 168, 234, 249; relative 169; beginning with, see Begin with
Advice, nature of in this book, 36; see Skepticism, Technique
Affect, 116
Agreement of subject and verb, see Number
aid verbs, 71, 97, 106
Airplane, 152
Aldine, 214
Alkaline, 48
All right, 116; other references, 21, 43, 51, 52, 59, 63, 70, 302
Almond, 393
Among, 41, 53, 63, 84
Analysis of errors, 147; see Diagraming, Parsing
And sentences, 136, 139, 148, 250, 261, 369, 418
And Co., 248
And-uh, 368
Angel, 42, 116
Angelita, Sister, 317
ant words, 48, 49, 88
Antecedents, 192
Aping masters, 410
Apostrophe, see Possessive, Contractions
Appositives for style, 145; also 129, 137, 190, 198, 253, 256, 273
Appreciation, 8, 16, 18, 22, 25, 26, 29; see Literature, Inspiring
Approval, see Social, Motivation
Arctic, 39, 53
Argument (spelling), 99
Argument (composition), 410
Arithmetic, 15
Arnold, 148
Arrangement, see Structure
Arthur, 469
Artificiality, see Sincerity
Artistry, 17, 152, 154, 325, 328, 410
As, 209, 260, 261, 263, 276, 389
As though, 379
Ashbaugh, 46, 62, 63
Asked, 64
Asks, 63
Astronomy, 15, 17, 19, 32, 33
At, 183
At all, 395
Ate, 173
Athletics, 39, 53
Auditory element, 48; see Spelling, not phonetic
Aught, 389
Aurner, 237
Authority: in grammar, 174; in pronunciation, 394; in punctuation 222, 231; in textbooks, 322
Authors as persons, 461; see Literature, history of
Auto, 389
Automorphism, 62, 64
Awful, 99, 389

Bad English, see Good English
Badly, 390
Baker, 433
Balance, 390
Barbarisms, 321, 322
Bates, 458
Beauty in composition, 7, 29; see Literary skill
Beauty (spelling), 45
Because, 390
Before, 63
Beginning, 91, 101
Begin with modifiers: General, 139-141, 144; Adverbs, 139; Clauses, 133, 136, 140, 147, 418; Prepositions, 140, also 135, 137, 147; in Oral, 369
Benefit, 68, 72
Besides, 390
Between, 121, 126
Bigelow, 223, 272
Biography, see Literature, history of
Blaisdell, 20, 294
Blame on, 390
Bloody, 383
Blunders, see Demons, Good English, Diction, Purism, *me*, etc.
Boeotia, 42
Books: for outside reading, 454-459; choosing, 428 (see Inspiring); lists of, 313, 458; Reports on, 459. See Classics, Reading, Literature
Both sides, 231, 255; see Parenthetical words, Non-restrictive
Brainy, 390
Breadth, 296
Brown, 6; see *How the French Boy*, France
Brutality, 85; see Severity, Sympathy
Bryant, 461
Bunch, 388
Buoyant, 394
Burst, 388
Bus, 102
Business (spelling), 41, 53, 63, 97, 98, 102
Business motive, 29, 314, 367, 372, 405
But, 173, 251, 347
Butler, 24, 126
Cabell, 24
Cajolery, 432; see Sincerity
California, University of, 4, 28
Camelot, 468
Can, 121
Canoeing, 99
Can't, 98
Capitals, 117, 246, 265, 269, 270, 272
Captain, 41
Captains Courageous, 324
Carefulness, 18; see Accuracy, Carelessness
Carelessness, 33, 36, 73-79, 227, 302, 303, 347, 416; see Habits wrong, Mastery, Minimum Essentials
Carlyle, 342, 463
Carrots, 136
Carter, 458
Caterpillar, 90
Certain, 57
Chagrined, 101
Challenges, 310
Chamberlain, 458
Changing age, 469-472; see Tastes, Usage
Character, 296, 297, 298, 442; see Responsibility, Morals
Charm, 21; see Literary skill
Chicago, 83
Choice of words, 148; see Good English, Diction, Vocabulary
Circumvent, 377
Classics, 434-439, 460-461; other references, 16, 20, 26, 31, 294, 323, 424, 454
Classifying of parts of speech, 166; see Parts of speech, Meaning
Clauses: defined, 181, 249; subordinate, 181, 204-208, 258-265 (see Conjunctions, Pronouns relative, Though, etc.); Coördinating, see Sentences compound, Conjunctions, *And, So, For;* three independent in one sentence, 136, 143; additive, 262; introductory, 258, 262, 263-265; beginning with, see Begin with; non-restrictive, 258 (see Non-restrictive)

Clearness, 150
Climax, 405-406; other references, 369, 398, 404
Coherence, 149, 403-404; see Structure
College Entrance Board, 330
Colleges: percentage of high-school students entering, 289; requirements, 27; conditions in, 289, 290, 293, 295, 308, 316, 367, 376; domination of, 289, 290, 295, 304, 314
Colloquialisms, 388
Colon, 269, also, 216, 240, 276
Combat, 101, 394
Come, 44
Community, 304, 318
Comma blunder, 285; see Sentence-error
Comma sentence, 233-237; see Sentence-error
Commas, 129, 246-266; conspectus of, 232; for compound sentence, 250, 252; not with other marks, 246 (see Dash with comma)
Complements, 186, 203; see Objects, Nominatives
Composition: defined, 24; nature of, 319-323 (see Theme value); importance of, 26, 28, 29, 127, 466 (see Social motive); types of, 408; literary ideals in, 17 (see Literary models); relation to literature, see Literature; oral, 349-370, also 20, 27, 28, 361-365, 397, 412, 413; relation of oral to written, 400; written, 349, 353, 364, 397-421. See Freedom, Results, Grammar, etc.
Compound words, 117; see Solid
Conclusions, 405; see Climax
Concrete vs. general, 171, 210; see Definiteness
Confusion in spelling, 90; see Spelling not phonetic
Conjugations, 187
Conjunctions, 249, also 129, 180, 196; two kinds of, 235; coördinating, 207, 208, 250; subordinating, 205-208 (see Adverbs); compound, 206, 208; in punctuation, 235
Connectives, 174, 196; see Conjunctions, Prepositions, Adverbs
Conquered territory, 177, 181, 284
Consonant, doubling, 100, 105
Constructions, see Nominative, Objects, Parallel, Nouns, etc.; all to be taught, 165
Constructive criticism, 346, 416, 421
Contractions, 91, 98, 110
Copulative, 185
Corbett, 137
Correcting themes, by student, 420-421, 411-412 (see Criticism) by teacher, see Grading
Correctness, 81, 121, 126, 173, 280; see Good English, Accuracy, Usage, Moral Law
Could (spelling), 44, 55
Courses of study, 284, 455
Covering ground, 164
Credits for reading, 459; see Mark
Criticism by students, 351, 359, 362, 412, 413; see Constructive, Grading
Cries, 18, 97
Crusading, 66

Daffodils, 287
Dartmouth, 74
Dashes, 146, 270, 271, 273-278; with commas, 215, 218, 222-224, 243, 272-274
Dates, 253
Debating, 27, 350, 410
Decency, 21; see Accuracy, Mechanics
Definite, 51, 52, 72
Definiteness in teaching, 8, 131, 135, 138, 171, 183, 252, 308, 344, 345, 445; see Technique, Results
Definitions, 175, 179
Deftness, 228; see Literary skill
Delayed, 97
Democracy, 66, 93, 303, 307, 319
Demons in spelling, 54-59, also 43, 51, 53, 71, 86-89, 102-113; local, 58; relative power of, 56, 59; as a disease, 76; see the words
Denny, 22
Dependent, 48

Derailing, 42
Derived forms, 91-93
Describe, 47, 51, 52, 59, 71, 77, 80, 102
Description, 399, 409
Descriptive, see Non-restrictive
Dessert, 87
Develop, 88
Devices, 28, 67, 74, 83, 113; see Technique
De Vinne, 219, 222, 224, 244
Diagraming, 163
Dickens, 464
Dickens's 95
Dictation, 118
Diction, 17, 23, 34, 81, 321, 379; see Good English
Dictionaries, 394
Dining, 64
Dirigible, 41
dis words, 107
Disappear, 41
Discriminating in grammar, 171, 179, 181
Dissecting words, 170
Divide, 52, 72
Dividing words, 312
Do, 44
Doesn't, 41, 53, 67, 98
Dolch, 439
Done, 44, 289
Don't, 98, 120
Don't you, 395
Door, 44
Drafts of themes, 411
Dramatics, 27
Drawing, 327
Drill, 19, 122, 228, 282; see Habits, Accuracy
Drinking, 471
Drive, 291, 301, 307, 310; see Drill, Warfare
Duly, 99
Duty, 303; see Responsibility, Morality
Dyeing, 99

e, dropped or kept, 90, 92, 99, 105, 111; longing for, 116
Echo question, 237
Economy Committee, 22
Ecstasy, 87
ed, 100; see Tenses, Consonants
Edgar, 207
Educational experts, 471
eed verbs, 116
Effect, 116
Effort in themes, 332, 348; see Grading
Either, 61
Eliot, C. W., 24, 282
Eliot, George, 411
Ellipses, 209, also 170, 191, 237, 257
Ellis, 411
Emanate, 48, 68
Emerson, 461
Encouragement, 348; see Motivation, Friendliness, Sympathy
Enemy, 66
English: defined, 30; importance of, 372 (see Social motive); conceptions of, 7-9, 16-30, (see Objectives); the many elements of, 26-28; see Good English, Diction, Vocabulary
English (spelling), 118
English Evidence, 5, 27, 374, 398
English Journal, 5, 20, 52, 229, 290, 294, 304-309, 329, 333, 361, 428
Engraved minds, 71
Enjoying, see Inspiring
Enough, 44, 61
Entertaining, 419; see Motivation, Literature
Entrance, 28, 29
Enunciation, 65, 355, 358
Errors, typical, 416; unit, 347; essential, 339-340 (see Minimum Essentials)
Essential modifier, see Non-restrictive
Essentials, see Minimum
Examinations, see Tests
Exceed, 61
Exclamation mark, 246, 271
Exercises, importance of, 164, 171; see Drill, Definiteness
Experience as the basis of method in this book, 9, 23, 24, 35, 52, 67, 74, 86, 113, 202, 212, 228, 251, 323, 354, 359, 361, 363, 365, 373, 375, 402, 413, 414; see Skepticism, Technique

Expletive, see *There, It*
Exposition, 302, 400, 410
Expression, 16; see Composition
Extreme, 46
Eye, 62
Eyes in spelling, 43, 53, 67, 69

Fashion, 383, 386; see Usage, Authority
Fellowship, 82; see Sympathy, Penalizing
Figures of speech, 463
Finally, 40, 51
Firstly, 380
Fluency, 280, 291, 296, 360, 362, 366, 412
For, 169, 203, 235, 249, 261
Force, 150; see Literary skill
Form in Composition, 326; see Accuracy, Minimum Essentials, Margins, Paragraphs, etc.
Forms, right and wrong, 70; similar together, 70-71; see Derived
Formality, 389
Forty, 41, 63
Foundation, 6, 294; see Rudiments, Mechanics, Minimum Essentials
France, 126, 163, 298, 373
Franklin, 411
Frankness, 455; see Sincerity
Freedom by mechanics, 231, 245, 304, 370
French, see France, *How the French Boy*
Friendliness, 82, 83, 436; see Sympathy, Severity
ful words, 116
Functions of words, 125; see Parts of speech, Syntax, Sentence sense
Fundamentals, 20, 295; see Mechanics, Accuracy, Minimum Essentials

Garage, 393
Genders, 313
Geometry, 331
Gerunds, 199, also 180, 257
Get, 380
Getting mad, 86
Girl, bad little, 415
Goethe, 426
Goldsmith, 463
Good English, 379-391, also 35, 120, 134, 373; see Pronunciation, Authority, Usage, Diction, Moral law
Government, 39
Grade, see Mark
Grading themes, 343-348, also 298, 305, 330, 332, 416, 417, 467; see Theme value
Grammar (spelling), 47, 51, 52, 59, 72, 87, 102, 112
Grammar: defined and explained, 120-131; general policies, 163-182; order of topics, 175, 177; teaching tactics, 157-210; when to be taught, 159-162, 284; teaching when needed, 161; for composition, 23, 127, 131, 132-151, 180, 290, 292, 295; for journalism, 161; for literature, 453; for knowledge, 151-156, 175, 209; for avoiding error, 126, 147; rules of, 124; when useless, 158, 164; horrors of, 122-124; no conquered territory, 159; discredited and restored, 158; never sticks, 132; as cure for disease, 130
Greenlaw, 442
Grey, 440, 459
Guérin, 411

Habits, right, 93, 239, 294, 297, 310; (see Mastery, Minimum Essentials); wrong, 34, 35, 47, 54, 71-73, 78, 101, 358, 395, 417; see Warfare
Half-sentences, 129, 153, 237, 269; see Sentence-error
Hall, 381
Hamlet, 230, 448, 460
Harshness, 74, 78, 85; see Severity, Sympathy
Harvard, 330
Have, 187
Haven't, 98
Having, 64
Hawk, 315
Heaven, 451
Heedlessness, 76; see Carelessness
Hillegas, 333-335
Hindrance, 39

History of literature, 461-463
Hodgson, 438
Home reading, see Reading
Homonyms, 68, 69
Honesty vs. arithmetic, 352; see Sincerity
Hoped, 64
Horn, 46
Horseshoeing, 99
How the French Boy Learns to Write, 6, 126, 290
Hudelson, 336
Humor in teaching, 83; see Sarcasm, Personality
Humphries, 307
Hyphens, 117; see Adjectives, compound

Icicle, 87
Idiom, see Diction, Good English
ie, changed to *y*, 98
ie and *ei* words, 113, 285
Ignorance, admitting, 171; see Illiteracy, Mechanics, Teachers
Illinois, University of, 24, 152, 324, 329
Illinois Bulletin, 128
Illiteracy, 7, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 307, 308, 318, 374; see Sentence sense, Minimum Essentials, Colleges
Illusions, 376, 441; see Theories, Results, Scales, Experience, Skepticism
Illustrate, 393
Imitation of methods, 83; see Sincerity, Skepticism, Personality
Immediately, 99
Impersonal, 192
Improvement, see Effort, Motivation, Responsibility, Habits
Incentive, 85; see Social, Motivation
Incidental teaching of mechanics, 21, 23, 35, 72, 81, 93, 125, 126, 131, 136, 150, 152, 196, 212, 230, 243, 280, 282, 288, 295, 306, 316, 317; see Drill, Warfare
Independent, 50
Independent clause, see Clauses, coördinate
Indiana, 127
Individuality, 16; see Personality
Inductive teaching, 90; see Definiteness, Technique
Infinitives: teaching, 201-204; for style, 133, 136, 144, 146, 151; infinitive clause, 169; subject of, 189
Influencing, see Sympathy, Taste, Sincerity, Motivation
ing, 100, 396
Inhabitant of Paradise, 449
Inland Empire, 312
Inn, 118
Innate power, 328; see Literary skill
Innocents Abroad, 460
Inspiring, 7, 16, 19, 28, 33, 35, 36, 287, 326, 424, 426, 427, 430-433, 438, 445; see Motivation, Social, Business
Interest (spelling), 40
Interest, see Motivation
Intransitive, 185; see transitive
Introductions, 345, 405
Introductory words, 269; see Quotations, Prepositions, Clauses, subordinate, *Namely*, Begin with modifiers
Inverted order, 141; see Begin with modifiers, Prepositions, etc.
Iowa, University of, 4
Irony, see Sarcasm
Irving, 461
It, 191-192
Its, 69, 88, 95

Johnson, 310
Jones, E. S., 397
Jones, W. F., 54
Jones's, 59
Journalism, 27
Judgment, 57, 99
Junior Highway Manual, 4

k, inserted, 116
Kayfetz, 336
Keats, 442
Keyser, 432
Kidnap, 102
Kings, 471
Lady of the Lake, 444
Laid, 71, 97

Large men, 80, 88, 282
Lay, compounds of, 97
Led, 71
Leniency, 74, 76, 78
Leonard, Mary H., 174
Leonard, S. A., 386
Lester, 92
Letters (correspondence), 400
Letters, never show the wrong, 51, 77, 84, 97; wrong ought to look queer, 84; see Derived forms
Library, 42
Lie, 18, 98, 184, 187
Life, preparation for, 29; see Real life, Objectives, Social, Business, Responsibility, Democracy
Like, 182, 194, 378, 384-385
Lineup, 99
Lippmann, 371, 375
Literary models for composition, 17, 125, 139, 149, 288, 321-323, 410-412, 421; see Theme value, Literature
Literary skill, 324-332, also 21, 24, 25, 344, 347; see Literary models, Theme value
Literary Tradition, 320, 374, 386, 405, 471, 472
Literature: importance of, 27-29, 31; teaching of, 3, 289, 295, 444-472; love of, 26, 429 (see Inspiring); as adventure, 442; as personifying, 462; details in, 447; tastes in, 434, 439, 441; modern, 456, 466; relation to composition, 29, 319, 321, 323, 465; separated from composition, 459, 465; for information, 432-438, 454, 457; history of, 434; chart of, 463
Logic in diction, 371-374; in grammar, 122, 164, 165, 173, 176, 199; in punctuation, 220; in spelling, 50, 63, 68, 71, 72, 96
Long, 305
Lose, 70, 88
Lounsbury, 382
Lovable, 99
Love of literature, 429; see Literature, Inspiring
Lowell, 150
Luckily, 97
ly words, 108
Lyman, 325, 456

Macaulay, 53, 113
Macbeth, 447, 448, 455
Macrobius, 53
Macy and Co., 373
Mad, getting, 86
Magic, 35
Magyar, 394
Manly, 222, 224
Manuscripts, ancient, 220, 221
Manuscript, form in school, 414, 415
Manutius, 214, 220
Margins, 415
Mark, final in English, 459, 466
Marks, see Symbols
Mastery, 310; in grammar, 154, 165, 179; in spelling, 58, 119; other references, 58, 59, 89, 280, 286, 369; see Habits, Minimum Essentials, Accuracy
Maximalists, 293, 295, 303, 312, 313, 315, 317, 334
McComb, 236
Me, as predicate, 120-122
Meanings: vs. syntax, 169, 180, 196, 199, 208; of words, 372, 375 (see Diction, Good English, Parts of speech); of symbols, 217 (see Symbols, Punctuation)
Meant, 53, 72
Mechanics, 282-304, also, 8, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 29, 32, 316 (see Minimum Essentials, Warfare, Habits); mechanics incidentally, 21, 22, 23 (see Incidental)
Mencken, 382, 388
ment words, 100
Merit, see Theme value, Scales, Standards, Grading
Metaphor, 148; see Figure of speech
Method, in grammar, 147, 165; see Spelling, Punctuation, etc.; see Technique
Mice, 96
Mileage, 99
Militarism, 304
Miller, 310

Milton, 468
Minnesota curriculum, 333, 466
Minute, 41, 51
Minima, 7; see Minimum Essentials
Minimum Essentials, 280-317, 337-340; defined, 299; danger of, 154; origin of, 305-309; lists of, 311; taught incidentally, 315 (see Incidental); let them steer you, 302; an ancient principle, 314; in pronunciation, 395; in words, 378; other references, 6, 7, 19, 74, 76, 80, 92, 119, 345, 346, 361, 374, 387, 396; see Warfare
Missionaries, 425, 426
Misspellings, see the words; see Spelling, Visual
Modifiers, 174; where belong, 140, 150; see Adjectives, Phrases, etc.; see Begin with modifiers; see Sentences, variety in
Moffett, 239
Monotony, 150; see sentences, variety in
Mood, 186
Morality in mechanics, 77-82, 297, 303, 317, 382, 386, 394; see Character, Responsibility
Motivation: in grammar, 162, 164, 174, 177, 200; in punctuation, 225-227; in spelling, 82-84, 86, also 58, 65, 71, 119; in sentences, 136, 138; in themes, 300, 302, 304, 306, 397; other references, 73, 77, 82-84, 150, 308, 317, 325, 348, 350, 364, 366, 393, 419, 438; see Social, Business, Real life, Sympathy
Moving pictures, 226
Mumpsimus, 34
Music, 431, 447

Namely, 243, 275-277
Names, double in grammar, 168
Narratives, 399, 409
Necessary, 51
Negatives, double, 122
New Jersey Report, 362
Newspapers, 264; see Periodicals
Night, 65
Ninth, 99
Nominatives, 190-191; absolute, 144, 191, 257; predicate, 165, 178, 188 (see Objectivitis); vocative, 242, 246; see Nouns, Subjects
Non-restrictive, 205, 263, 257, 258 (see parenthetical words)
Notes, 448, 452
Nouns: defined, 175; constructions of, 187-191; adverbial, 170, 188; compared with gerunds, 199
Novelists, 411
Novices, 8, 28, 30-33, 157, 243, 284, 287, 293, 314, 325, 359, 424, 428, 439, 472
Number, agreement of verb, 121, 123

o, 247
Objectives of English, 3, 8, 9, 19, 20, 26, 29, 30, 164, 334; see Minimum Essentials, Scales, Grading
Objectivitis, 188, also 33, 178, 183, 185, 187
Object of, passion for, 178, 203; see Objectivitis
Objective constructions (syntax), 188; adverbial, 189; indirect, 170, 189; objective predicate, 253; retained object, 166, 189
Obsolete words, 322
Occasion, 41, 63, 84
Occurred, 59, 65, 91
Octopus, 393
oe verbs, 99
Oleomargarine, 395
Omaha teacher, 316
Omit, 72
Omitted words, 253; see Understood words, Ellipses
Opinions of literature, 438; see Tastes, Illusions, Public
Optimism, 360
Oral composition, 3, 304; see Composition
Originality, 24, 326, 408; see Literary skill
Originally 51, 67, 68
Orr, 306
ough words, 44
Outlines, 405-408, 416
Outside reading, 457; see Reading

Paid, 71, 97
Painting, 447
Palmer, 373
Papers, see Themes, Tests, Newspapers
Paradise, 450
Paradise Lost, 456
Paragraphs, 402-405, also 18, 407
Parallel constructions, 143, 146
Parentheses, 271-273
Parenthetical words, 231-232, 252, 254-256, 274, 276; see Nonrestrictive
Parliament, 87
Parsing, 163
Participles: classified, 194; teaching, 200-201; for style, 133, 137, 161, 257
Particular, 39, 53, 92 (for punctuation see That particular)
Parts of speech defined by function, 166, 175, 182, 207; the four kinds of, 174
Paul, 458
Pauses for punctuation, 221, 242, 243
Peaceable, 63, 99
Pedagogy, 30, 45, 471; see Technique, Sympathy, etc.
Penalizing for lack of literary skill, 328; see Literary skill, Severity; for carelessness, 414; see Minimum Essentials, Spank them
Pence, 224
Pendleton, 417
People, 62
Performance, 40
Perhaps, 40, 70
Periodic sentences, 140
Periodicals, 225, 264
Periods, 234, 235, 245; oral, 353
Personal, see Personality, Pronouns
Personality, 30, 70, 402, 419, 427, 428; see Authors
Persons in literature, see Authors
Phonetic element in spelling, 39-45
Phrases: defined, 168, 179; introductory, 240, 243, 255, 256, 257, 264 (see prepositions); beginning with, see Begin with
Picnicking, 73
Picture (spelling), 46
Picture, seeing the, 444
Pilot Book, 4, 147, 398-400
Pine, 89
Pity, 73, 76, 78, 188
Place, 390
Planning themes, 402; see Outlines, Structure
Pleasure, see Inspiring, Books, Motivation
Plurals, 97, 102, 123; in *o*, 115
Poe, 211, 216, 273
Poetry, 431, 435, 444; see Literature
Possessives, 109; difficulty of teaching, 92-96; need of, 87; of pronouns, 95; as adjectives, 127; objects of prepositions, 190, 192
Prairie, 58
Praise, 417, 418
Preaching, 78, 80
Predicate, whole, 171
Predicate, see Adjectives, Nominatives, Nouns, Objective constructions
Prefer, 100
Prepositions, 179; for style, 193-195; at end of sentence, 195; see Begin with
Prevision, 402, 406
Pride, appeal to, 306; see Incidental, Social, Motivation, Responsibility
Principal, 48
Principle, 48
Probably, 40
Professional skill, 329; see Literary skill
Professional spirit, see Technique, Methods, Devices
Projects, 35
Pronouns, 176; as independent words, 191, 234; relatives, constructions of, 197, 204-206; possessive of, 95; ambiguous 273 (see Antecedents)
Pronunciation, 356-358, 393-396; correctness in, 81 (see Authority); in spelling, 48, 50, 84 (see Spelling, not phonetic)
Public opinion, 389; see Social, Queerness
Pugilism, 137
Pumpkin, 313

Punctuation: importance of, 229, 230; as separation, 231; conspectus of, 232; nature of rules, 211-243; present code of, 244-278, also 219, 221, 225, 226; wrong rules of, 239-243; in France, 10; grammar for, 155; at beginning of line, 278; as learned incidentally, 23. See Commas, Pauses, Addresses, etc.
Purism, 23, 386
Purposes in English, see Objectives; in themes, 401, 409

Queerness as motive, 82-84, 392
Question mark, 270, 278
Quotations, 265, 268, 270, 286; divided, 234; syntax of, 207; direct for style, 142

Rationale, 34
Reading, 20, 26, 422-443; school conditions, 291, 294 (see Literature); improved by composition, 319; see Classics, Books
Real life, 307, 314, 367, 377, 385, 412; see Social, Business
Receive, 61
Recognize, 53
Recollect, 63
Recommend, 46, 88
Redfield, 309, 453
Relatives, 262; see Pronouns
Repetition (spelling), 48, 53, 88
Repetition of words, 418
Responsibility, 89, 119, 303, 307, 346, 364; see Mastery, Social, Business, Motivation, Minimum Essentials
Restrictive, see Non-restrictive
Results (the references are simply some examples), 88, 94, 130, 150, 355, 356, 358, 360, 363, 365-370, 374, 376, 396; see Habits, Technique; Keeping still about how secured, see Technique
Revision, 411
Reynolds, 307
Rhetoric, 321
Right, see Forms, Letters, Manuscript, Spelling, etc.
Rough, 44
Ruch, 453
Rudiments, 6, 7, 285, 292, 314, 320, 369; see Minimum Essentials
Rules: for punctuation, 155, 226, 227; not important for punctuation, 239; never punctuate without, 239, 274; wrong of punctuation, 239-243, 275, 276; for spelling, 90-100; for silly correctness, 23, 303; dread of, 245
Run-on sentences, 129, 236
Ruskin, 133

s, names ending in, 95
Said, 71, 97
Salutations, 270
Santayana, 402
Sarcasm, 77, 83, 101, 113
Saturday Evening Post, 225, 460
Scales: for grading themes, 332-342; of skill, 329
Scholarship vs. Pedagogy, 183
Schoolian sense, 360
Schools, differences in, 364, 412
Science, 426, 431, 470
Scott, F. N., 24
Scott, Sir W., 444, 461
Searson, 294
Seeing the Picture, 436, 444
Self-expression, 16; see Composition, Literary skill, Freedom
Semicolon, 266-269, also, 143, 234, 236, 275
Sentence City, 128
Sentences: three types of structure, 181; simple, 139, 142, 145; complex, see Clauses subordinate, Relatives, etc.; compound, 250 (see *And, So, But, For);* four forms of, 141; two parts of, 171; types to avoid and to cultivate, 138-147; variety in, 136-147, 149, 369, 418. See Sentence-error, Sentence sense, Periods, Semicolons, Periodic, Run-on, Comma sentence, Topic sentence, Adverbs as independent, etc.

Sentence-error, 238, also 129, 152-154, 155, 182, 196, 248, 268, 279, 286, 340, 347; students allowed to use, 233, 238; see Comma sentence, Sentence sense, Half-sentence
Sentence sense, 127, 151, 226, also 18, 24, 29, 32, 124, 126, 128, 175, 196, 228, 229, 230, 233, 284, 288, 289, 290, 292, 299, 350, 353, 355, 367; see Sentence-error
Sentiment, 419, 439
Separate, 112, also 34, 47, 52, 55, 57, 59, 63, 72, 87
Series of words, for style, 144; punctuation of, 247, 266, 268
Set off, 231; see Parenthetical
Severity in teaching, 233, 300, 301, 305, 306, 310, 313, 317, 330, 344, 414; see Minimum Essentials, Spank them, Grading, Sympathy
Shakespeare, 33
Shall and *will*, 313, 387
Shan't, 99
Sheik, 115
Shelley, 173, 461
Shepherd, 53
Shepherd's pipe, 421
Sheridan, 47, 349, 353, 365; his *Speaking and Writing English*, 398
Should (spelling), 44
Silver Star Boy, 288
Similar, 66
Simons, 439
Simplified, see Spelling
Since, 118, 261
Sincerely, 99
Sincerity, 36, 82, 83, 308, 331, 345, 354, 426, 427, 430, 432, 434, 436, 438, 440, 443, 455, 472
Singeing, 99
Skepticism of this book, to be used by readers, 31, 38, 45, 50, 64, 67, 69, 74, 87, 125, 151, 154, 193, 203, 211, 225, 283, 298, 327, 329, 331, 337, 343, 352, 374, 414, 441, 462, 469, 472
Skill, see Literary skill
Slang, 391
Slovenliness, 296; see Carelessness
Snapper, 406
So, 136, 139, 148, 197, 209, 249, 252, 261, 263, 369
Social motive, 82-84, 121, 154, 173, 225, 288, 290, 297, 298, 315, 323, 332, 334, 335, 352, 357, 358, 367, 372, 384, 385, 391, 392, 395, 396; see Business, Democracy, Real life
Socializing, 35, 76-78, 300, 436-438, 449, 458
Solid words, 107, 117
Some, 44
Souls, 308, 334, 424, 425
Sounds: obscure, 48, 49; in spelling, 65, 84, 101; see Pronunciation, Enunciation, Spelling not phonetic, *ing*, *a*, etc.
Spacing words, 419
Spank them, 415
Speak, 70
Spectator Papers, 461
Spelling, 24, 37-119; not phonetic, 48, 56, 60, 72; simplified, 60, 65, 66; as hard and easy, 84, 86; high school vs. the grades, 43, 45-48, 62; hard words in, 89 (see Demons); as moral, 74, 77, 79-82; as social compact, 81; professing our ignorance of, 88-90
Sperlin, 21
Spontaneity, 25; see Literary skill, Self-expression
Stag, 445
Standards: in literature, 439; in diction, 385, 386 (see Good English, Usage); of achievements by teachers, 360; of minima, 307; see Theme value, Mastery, Minimum Essentials, Scales, Grading
Stayed, 97
Stevenson, 411, 419, 440
Stimulus, 355; see Motivation, Inspiring, Sympathy, Social, Business
Stop (diction), 134
Stopped, 59, 64-66, 91, 92, 100
Strategy, see Technique, Minimum Essentials, Motivation, etc.

Structure, 402-408; in oral, 359, 362, 367; in written themes, 344-345, 351, 398, 409
Style: defined, 132-135; in themes, 25, 314, 320, 342, 344, 386, 410, 411; as diction, 134, 148. See Literary skill, Literary Tradition, Literary models, Structure, Sentences, variety in, Paragraphs, Grammar
Subjective, see Grading Scales
Subjects of verbs, 152, 171, 177, 187; using only one, 145
Subjunctive, 123, 186
Subordination, 143, 149; see Begin with modifiers, Prepositions, etc.
Substantives, 174-175
Summey, 225
Sure, 41, 83
Surely, 100
Surprise, 39, 47, 53
Sustenance, 48
Swimming, 468
Syllables, 48, 100-102, 312, 419
Symbols for correcting themes, 313, 346-347, 417
Sympathy with students' minds, 64, 67, 73, 82, 83, 94, 100, 131, 138, 162, 168, 171, 175, 176, 183, 190, 196, 200, 203, 233, 251, 300, 304, 308, 317, 344, 348, 357, 378, 384, 406, 421, 435, 441, 457
Syntax, 153, 156, 163, 172 (see Grammar, Ellipses, etc.); as not meanings of words, 169 (see Meanings)

Tale of Two Cities, 464
Taste, in spelling, 94; in literature, see Literature
Teachers: as readers, 446; as speakers, 356, 367; as writers, 330-331; ignorance of, 72, 88, 90, 118, 128, 152, 243, 295, 375; professional spirit of, see Technique, Skepticism, Experience
Teall, 224, 244, 245
Technique (the references are merely some illustrations): in general, 7, 8, 21, 27, 28, 30, 33-35, 471; in grammar, 167, 168, 176, 197, 199, 205; in literature, 445, 447; in minima, 317; in oral composition, 356, 363, 364; in punctuation, 252, 259, 260, 274; in sentences, 139, 150; in spelling, 47, 50, 57, 58, 60, 66, 76, 93, 118; in written themes, 301, 305, 417; in vocabulary, 373, 376, 378
Technique, keeping still about, 130, 136, 149, 282, 283, 369, 446
Tenses, spelling, 64-65, 92, 97; in conjugations, 187
Tests, 447, 453, 467
Textbooks, 15, 17, 19, 462
Than, 209, 263
That, 123, 198, 262
That particular, 258-261
Theater, 39
Their, 55, 69
Theme-Building, 5
Themes: nature of, 25, 318, 324-332 (see Theme value); how students make, 401, 406; management of, handling, 397-421, 412-421 (see Composition, Titles, Margins, etc.); preserving, 413, 420; rewriting and correcting, 420 (see Drafts, Correcting). See Paragraphs, Structure, Composition, Sentences, etc.
Theme value, 335, 318-348, also 24, 25, 74, 298, 305; see Grading
Theories of English, 35, 441; see Outlines, Diction, Good English, Paragraphs, etc.
There (spelling), 55, 69
There, expletive, 121, 123, 173, 187
Therefore, 197
They, 73
Thinking, training in, 65, 133, 165, 176, 201, 282
Thor, 34
Thorndike, 336, 342, 377
Though, 249
Through (spelling), 65
Through (diction), 384
Tie, 98
Titles of themes, 415
Toeing, 99
Tom Sawyer, 443

Too, 51, 59, 63, 68, 69, 73, 118, 302
Topic sentences, 403
Topics for themes, 397, 410
Tragedy, 64
Transfer noise, 368
Transitive, 184-185
Translation, 39
Travel, 101
Tries, 18, 21, 59
Trouble-spots, 45-53, 112
Truly, 99
Two, 62
Type-form, 92
Types of composition, 408

u, 97
Understanding words, 169, 210; see Ellipses
Uniformity in grammar, 168
Universities, see Wisconsin, California, etc.
Unphonetic words, 44, 62, see Spelling
Usage: in idiom, 173, 380-391 (see Diction); in punctuation, 220, 244
Use, see Parts of speech
Utter, 120

Value in school subjects, 352; see Theme value
Variety in sentences, see Sentences
Vegetable, 41
Vengeance, 99
Verbs: teaching of, 183-187; phrase, 170, 183, 200; importance of, 152; compound for style, 137, 145; as transitive or intransitive, 184; introducing, 266; agreement with subject, see Number
Verbals, 198-204, also, 174, 178, 180; for style, 143; see Infinitives, Participles, Gerunds
Victorian, 375, 471
Villain, 41
Virtues in themes, 329, 344; see Theme value
Vision, 298
Visitor, 57
Visual appeal, 66-71
Visual confusion, 53; see Trouble-spots, Spelling not phonetic
Visualizing, 436; see Seeing
Vitalizing, 325; see Motivation, Social, Sympathy
Vocabulary, 371-396, also 35, 320, 351, 360, 374; size of, 377
Vocative, 242, 246
Voice, improving, 358
Voice of verb, 185
Vulgarism, 388

War in literature, 469, 471; avoided by literature, 441
Warfare, teaching as, 294-298, also 34, 71, 86, 138, 230, 304, 307, 374
Was, 33, 122, 173
Washburne, 311
Weak, 70
Webster, 122
Wendell, 120
What, 198
When, 262; *when suddenly*, 418
Where, 262
Which (spelling), 55
Which, to form sentences, 129, 237
While, 135
Whipple, 440
Whitney, 174, 189, 200, 202
Whittier, 423
Wilson, 221-224, 229, 240, 275
Wisconsin, University of, 24, 29, 125, 153, 310, 314, 324
With, 194, 258
Without, 63
Woman, 45
Won't, 99
Words, see *able* words, etc.; see Compound, Solid, Parts of speech, Dividing, Diction, Spelling, Parenthetical, Obsolete, Repetition, Ellipses, Understanding, Vocabulary
Workways, 5, 401
Wordsworth, 461
Would, 44, 55; see Shall
Wright, 440
Writing, see Composition
Wyoming, University of, 315

y, changed to *i*, 91, 92, 95, 97, 106, 107
Youth of today, 472

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